

# Behavior change slow or impossible if process is too difficult

January 13 2011, by Leslie Cranford

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Texas Tech professor, nation's expert on Social Validity, says interventions or processes must have buy-in from consumer to be effective.

With [statistics](#) showing that somewhere around 30 percent of people who make New Year's resolutions will ditch them by the end of January, it may seem the odds are against long-term [behavior change](#). But common sense and the concept of social validity dictate that the process for change must be one the participant accepts willingly and that the procedure for behavior change be simple, said a Texas Tech University education professor.

Stacy Carter, an assistant professor in the College of Education's Special Education Program, is the author of several research articles on social validity and a recently published a book, *The Social Validity Manual*. This is the only book ever published on the topic of social validity, which has relevance for several fields of study including psychology, education, social work and health services.

"The traditional way of looking at a behavior change is seeing how effective a treatment is," Carter said. "Researchers spend a lot of time looking at statistical validity and reliability of the treatments they develop. Social validity is a much more practical look that researchers sometimes ignore."

Carter said researchers may develop a treatment that has very high

statistical validity and is very reliable, but if it is too difficult or time consuming, then consumers won't use it or practitioners won't use it in their everyday practice. If it's something that is going to cause them a lot of effort, or is difficult to implement, then they probably are not going to use it for long.

To measure social validity, the behavior must be observable and measurable. "The goal is to make people happier with the treatments they are receiving," Carter said. "If you're happier with what you're doing and it's effective in all these different ways, then you're more likely to use it and everyone's going to be happier – the person who has to implement it, the practitioner, the person receiving the treatment."

Carter offered this example. "What you see a lot in school settings would be off-task behavior – students not working on what they're supposed to be working on. A typical intervention for that might be something like a token economy – where they get rewards or points for staying on task. That would be something that a teacher could do very easily. They could keep track or even have the student learn to keep track themselves. Also to have their peers monitor them as well." For the arrangement to work, the teacher, student and student's peers would all have to have buy-in to the system.

Carter also is working as a consultant with a group of researchers from three German universities. Researchers from Goethe University, the German Institute for International Research and the Sigmund Freud Institute provided support for Carter to travel to Frankfurt in November. He made a presentation and collaborated with researchers who wish to incorporate his "Distributive Model of Social Validity" into their research studies. These German researchers focus on longitudinal research projects within educational settings and hope to improve their social validation procedures.

The Social Validity Manual has been awarded the College of Education Faculty Book Award and currently is nominated for the President's Faculty Book Award university-wide.

Provided by Texas Tech University

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