Body size measurements in public health: A social justice & weight stigma perspective

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Presenter Disclosures
Natalie Ingraham

(1) The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:
No relationships to disclose

Learning Objectives

- Evaluate the critiques of common body size measurements such as BMI or silhouette matching tests (SMT) in public health practice.
- Explain how current body size measurement may support weight stigma in public health contexts.
- Evaluate the feasibility and usefulness of emerging technologies in providing accurate, non-stigmatizing body measurements for use in public health research.

Who’s interested in body size?

- Fat Studies
- Public Health

Why do we measure bodies?
Current Body Measurement Tools

- BMI
- Weight
- Silhouette matching tests (right)
- Waist Circumference
- Clothing size
- Self-identification

Body Measurement Critiques

- **BMI**: (Burkhauser & Cawley, 2008)
  - Doesn’t take muscle/fat ratio into account
  - Not designed as an individual-level assessment
  - Poorly predictive
  - Standardization based on White male body

Body Measurement Critiques

- **Body line drawings**: (Ambrosi-Randic, Pokrajac-Bulian, & Taksic, 2005; Gardner, Jappe, & Gardner, 2009; Peterson et al., 2003)
  - Don’t account for differences in body shape
  - Drawings aren’t standardized between drawings
  - Female participants usually white, feminine-presenting, hourglass shaped
  - Limited in the upper and lower ranges of body sizes (only up to 140% of “average body weight”)
Weight Stigma

81% of 10 year-olds are afraid of being fat. Weight stigma can be dangerous.

EVERYBODY ENJOYS SOMEBODY
Learn more and get help: NEDAwareness.org

What are other options?

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Cartoon by Stephen Taaffe