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Body mass index and body fat in college age males and females: Perception versus reality

Objective: This study's purpose is advancing knowledge about perceptions of healthy body fat and BMI among undergraduate students, examining the relationship between believed and actual body characteristics.

Participants: In September 2009, 413 freshmen completed a survey asking students to self-assess body fat percentage, BMI and weight among other questions.

Methods: Students were surveyed prior to and after taking body measurements. Regression was used to understand how different categories predicted level of accuracy in students' assessments.

Results: Findings suggest students less accurately estimated BMI than body fat percentage. Interactions suggest females and males differ in estimation accuracy and this varied by fat categories. Additionally, 90% of students believed body fat percentage easier to understand than BMI.

Conclusions: Since body fat percentage was significantly better understood, this measurement should be used to educate individuals on healthy weight and body composition status on a wider scale.

Biography

Lynn Romejko Jacobs' prior appointment (1980) to S.M.U. found her developing a passion and interest in adult fitness as the physical supervisor at the Dallas Cardiac Institute working to rehabilitate patients who had undergone heart surgery. She also spent two years as an Athletic Director for the oil corporation, the Western Company of N.A. in Ft. Worth, Texas. Designing employees' fitness programs along with coordinating incentives and benefits within the company were strategic to the success of this experience. These two experiences prepared her for a continued growth in adult fitness and wellness. Lynn joined the faculty at SMU in 1980 as an Assistant Professor and now currently enjoys the appointment of Full Professor. During her early years she designed and implemented a well received exercise program for the faculty and staff, the "Out to Lunch Bunch". She assisted Dr. Birdie Barr in implementing a comprehensive wellness program with employee benefits in the early 1980's. Teaching highlights during this period of the '80's focused on: ballroom/folk dance, corporate fitness practicum and internships for the Physical Education majors on the Corporate Fitness Track.

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