

## **Complexities of the Body Weight Screening Experience: A Qualitative Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and NIH emphasize the use of weight-related screenings as a means to increase motivation of overweight/obese individuals to manage body weight. Yet, little is known about individual responses to receiving such screenings, which could inform future research. **PURPOSE:** To examine the acute, qualitative responses to a common body weight and composition screening in a sample of women classified as ‘overfat’ by a validated body fat percentage (BF%) cutoff. **METHODS:** Of 14 volunteers responding to a study ad assessing personal experience to a weight screening, 10 women ( $30.21 \pm 16.64$  years;  $39.39\% \pm 6.60\%$ ;  $28.25 \pm 6.15$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>) were classified as ‘overfat’. Following DEXA testing, participants were provided with their weight and composition results, and then given 1-minute to evaluate. Participants were asked a series of questions guided by qualitative description regarding their experience. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with open and axial coding to identify recurring themes. **RESULTS:** Five themes, represented here as internalized questions, emerged to summarize the individual experience: (1) Is this a threat to me? (2) Why is this a threat? (3) How does this make me feel? (4) Am I motivated? (5) What am I motivated to do? Theoretically, the results support a novel confluence of self-regulation and coping theories, where a weight-related discrepancy produced by the screening triggered perceptions of threat to self, including the appraisal of what is at stake during a stressful encounter (self-esteem, survival/health, sex/attractiveness, social status, family, physical functioning), which guided the appraisal process. Subsequently, emotional and motivational responses varied, as did coping choices (physical activity, healthy/unhealthy dietary changes, heightened self-regulation, seeking social support). **CONCLUSIONS:** The findings support the use of screenings to heighten awareness to one’s body weight, yet highlight the complexity of individuals’ responses and importance of ‘appraisal stakes’. This study challenges the belief that screenings always trigger

healthy, weight control efforts, while highlighting difficulties and potential bias in recruiting overweight women to volunteer for such screenings.

