

Body image and eating disordered behavior in a community sample of Black and Hispanic women

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Abstract

Objective: The current study examined body image concerns and eating disordered behaviors in a community sample of Black and Hispanic women. In addition, this study explored whether there are ethnic differences in the correlates or in the prediction of body image concerns.

Method: Participants were 120 (67 Black and 53 Hispanic) women who responded to advertisements to participate in a study of women and health. Participants completed a battery of established self-report measures to assess body image, eating disordered behaviors, and associated psychological domains.

Results: Black and Hispanic women did not differ significantly in their self-reports of body image, eating disordered behaviors, or associated psychological measures. Comparisons performed separately within both ethnic groups revealed significant differences by weight status, with a general graded patterning of greater concerns in obese than overweight than average weight groups. In terms of predicting body image, multiple regression analyses testing a number of variables, including BMI, performed separately for Black and Hispanic women revealed that eating concern and depressive affect were significant predictors of body image concern for both groups.

Discussion: Overall, Black and Hispanic women differed little in their self-reports of body image, eating-disordered features, and depressive affect. Higher weight was associated with a general pattern of increased body image concerns and features of eating disorders in both groups and with binge eating in Black women. Eating concerns and depressive affect emerged as significant independent predictors of body image for both ethnic groups.

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Research on ethnic differences in eating- and weight-related constructs has resulted in an equivocal literature. [Shaw, Ramirez, Trost, Randall, and Stice \(2004\)](#), in their critical review, noted that studies in the 1980s tended to report that ethnic minorities endorsed lower eating disturbances than Caucasian individuals, while more recent research has generally suggested few significant ethnic differences. Yet, despite these overall trends, some recent studies have continued to find greater pathology among Caucasian than ethnic minority groups on measures of body image and eating behavior (e.g., [Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002](#); [White & Grilo, 2005](#); [White, Kohlmaier, Varnado-Sullivan, &](#)

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Williamson, 2003), while others have reported conflicting findings. For example, Fitzgibbon et al. (1998) found Hispanic women to report higher concerns with binge eating than their Black and White counterparts.

It has become increasingly clear that it is not just White, middle- and upper-class females who are at risk for developing body image and eating disturbances, a “myth” that Yanovski (2000) notes is still widely maintained in our society. Indeed, as Yanovski argued, individuals belonging to diverse racial and ethnic groups may be at comparable risk for developing body image problems and disordered eating patterns. For example, in a study of fourth- and fifth-grade Black and Hispanic girls, Vander Wal and Thomas (2004) found that 10.1% and 12.7% of these respective samples had scores on the Children’s Eating Attitude Test (ChEAT) suggestive of an eating disorder. Therefore, research must continue to work toward the development of a more comprehensive understanding of the patterns of body image- and eating-related variables among all ethnic groups, especially those of Black and Hispanic descent, as these are two of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2005).

Shaw et al.’s (2004) review of the literature suggested that there now seems to be increased parity among 4 ethnic groups: Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White. In an effort to extend our knowledge of such ethnic differences (and similarities), we aimed to further examine body image and eating behaviors of Black and Hispanic women from a community sample. We were interested in determining if and how these two minority groups differ in these variables, as well as how previously supported predictors of eating problems relate to, and predict, both body image and eating behavior.

1. Method

1.1. Participants

Participants were Black and Hispanic women who responded to print advertisements (flyers) seeking women at least 18 years of age who would “like to share your thoughts on eating and health.” The flyers indicated that participants would be paid \$20 and that all information would be kept confidential. Flyers specifically targeting women who were Black and Hispanic were posted throughout community businesses and organizations in an urban setting. Participants were included if reading ability was adequate enough to complete self-report measures. Human Investigations Committee approval was obtained and participants provided written informed consent.

Of the 120 women included in the study, 67 (56%) were Black and 53 (44%) were Hispanic. The age of women in the sample ranged from 18 to 58 years ($M=34.8$, $SD=9.7$). The majority of participants were single (70%), while the remaining were married (21%) or living with a partner (7%). Chi-square analysis revealed significant differences between the Black and Hispanic samples in their marital status, $\chi^2(2)=19.52$, $p<0.001$. That is, more Hispanic women (40%) were married than Black women (7%), while Black women (87%) were more likely to be single than their Hispanic counterparts (52%). More participants were employed (67%) than unemployed (53%). However, the large majority of participants (50%) reported an income of less than \$15,000, while 17% reported an income between \$15,000 and \$25,000, and 26% reported having an income greater than \$25,000. Chi-square analysis of family income revealed that there were significant differences between the Black and Hispanic women, $\chi^2(2)=16.52$, $p<0.001$. Within each group, Black women (69%) were more likely to report a family income of \$15,000 or less, while the Hispanic sample (44%) was more likely to have an income of \$25,000 or more.

1.2. Assessment and measures

Participants completed a battery of standardized measures of body image, eating attitudes and behavior, psychological functioning, and a demographic questionnaire. Each participant filled out these materials anonymously in a private room.

1.2.1. Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ)

The BSQ (Cooper, Taylor, Cooper, & Fairburn, 1987) is a 34-item instrument of preoccupation with and distress about one’s body shape. Participants rate items (e.g., ‘Have you felt so bad about your shape that you have cried?’) on a scale from 1 (never) to 6 (always); higher scores reflect greater dissatisfaction. The BSQ has demonstrated good reliability and validity (Rosen, Jones, Ramirez, & Waxman, 1996). In the current study, the internal consistency (Cronbach’s α) of the BSQ was 0.98 for both the Black and Hispanic samples.

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