

Correlates of problematic eating behaviors in less acculturated Latinas

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Abstract

We examined whether body weight, depression, and body dissatisfaction could predict problematic eating behaviors in a community sample of less acculturated adult Latina women. Three hundred and forty-nine Latina women ages 20–40 were classified as non-overeater ($n=244$), eating disorder not otherwise specified-binge eating disorder features (EDNOS-BED) ($n=65$), or eating disorder not otherwise specified-bulimia nervosa features (EDNOS-BN) ($n=40$). Participants completed measures of problematic eating behaviors, depression, and body image. Results revealed that normal weight and overweight women were at a higher risk only for EDNOS-BN, while obese women were at a higher risk for either EDNOS-BN or EDNOS-BED. Women with high depression scores were 16 times more likely to be assigned to the EDNOS-BN group than women with lower depression scores. Results illustrate the important role of depression and body weight in predicting problematic eating in less acculturated Latinas.

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Despite the previously held assumption that eating disorders occur primarily among White women in westernized countries (Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2001), results from more recent studies reveal that problematic eating behaviors also occur in Latinas and African Americans (Bruce & Agras, 1992; Cachelin, Rebeck, Veisel, &

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Striegel-Moore, 2001; Cachelin & Striegel-Moore, 2006; Cachelin, Veisel, Striegel-Moore, & Barzegarmazari, 2000; Chamorro & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Crago, Shisslak, & Estes, 1996; Fitzgibbon, Blackman & Avellone, 2000; Fitzgibbon, Spring, Avellone, Blackman, Pingitore, & Stolley, 1998; Gilbert, 2003; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002; Perez, Voelz, Pettit, & Joiner, 2002; Smith, 1995; The McKnight Investigators, 2003; Wilfley, Schreiber, Pike, Striegel-Moore, Wright, & Rodin, 1996). In addition, among certain ethnic minority groups, prevalence rates of BN and BED, as well as eating disorder symptoms, are similar to or higher than in Whites (Cachelin & Striegel-Moore, 2006; Robinson, Chang, Haydel, & Killen, 2001; Rosen & Gross, 1987; Smith & Krejci, 1991). The majority of these findings, however, have been based on studies with either ethnic minority children (Robinson et al., 2001), adolescents (The McKnight Investigators, 2003), or college-aged students (Perez et al., 2002); African American children or adults (Striegel-Moore, Schreiber, Lo, Crawford, Obarzanek, & Rodin, 2000a; Striegel-Moore, Wilfley, Pike, Dohm, & Fairburn, 2000b); more acculturated Latinas (Perez et al., 2002); or small samples of Latinas seeking eating disorder treatment (Cachelin et al., 2001). As such, relatively little is known about problematic eating behaviors in *less acculturated adult Latinas* who are in the community and not seeking treatment for eating disorders. Examining problematic eating behaviors in less acculturated Latinas is important because compared to more acculturated Latinos, they tend to adhere to more traditional Latino values and lifestyles (including speaking Spanish), and relatively little is known about eating disorders in less acculturated Latinas.

There is also a dearth of research on *correlates* of problematic eating behaviors in community-based samples of Latinas. Although a recent review paper focused on eating disorder risk factors (Stice, 2002), ethnic differences in correlates of eating problems were not specifically analyzed. Therefore, little is known about correlates of problematic eating behaviors such as body weight, depression, and body image dissatisfaction in less acculturated Latinas, despite the fact that a large body of research suggests that these are important risk factors in the development and maintenance of eating disorders (Stice, 2002). To address this limitation, the present study focused on three commonly-cited correlates of eating problems in less acculturated adult Latinas.

Body weight is one commonly cited correlate of eating problems (Stice, 2002). In particular, obesity is correlated with binge eating in treatment-seeking (de Zwaan & Mitchell, 1992; Telch & Agras, 1994) and community samples (Bruce & Agras, 1992; Johnsen, Gorin, Stone, & le Grange, 2003; Smith, Marcus, Lewis, Fitzgibbon, & Schreiner, 1998). Obesity may predispose individuals to binge eat, or conversely, obesity may be the result of binge eating (Telch, Agras, & Rositter, 1988). Among Latinas, body weight may be a particularly important risk factor for eating disorders due to their higher rates of obesity (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden, & Johnson, 2002). However, to date, no studies have examined the role of body weight in problematic eating behaviors among less acculturated Latina females.

Negative affect, and specifically depression, has also been investigated as a risk factor for eating problems (Stice, 2002). Depression tends to increase as eating pathology increases (Grissett & Fitzgibbon, 1996; Johnsen et al., 2003; Telch & Agras, 1994). However, it is unclear whether this association is consistent across ethnic groups. Two studies found that binge eating and depressive symptomatology were positively correlated among ethnic minorities (Fitzgibbon et al., 1998; Smith et al., 1998). However, the relationship between depression and problematic eating behaviors has not been examined among less acculturated adult Latinas.

Body image is a third commonly cited correlate of problematic eating behaviors. In fact, dissatisfaction with one's body image is one of the most consistent and robust risk factors for eating pathology (Stice, 2002). Those who internalize Western culture's beauty ideal of a thin body yet simultaneously fail to achieve that ideal, tend to experience body image dissatisfaction (Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2001). Among adolescent ethnic minority females, a negative body image is related to eating disorder symptoms (French, Story, Neumark-Sztainer, Downes, Resnick, & Blum, 1997; Joiner & Kashubeck, 1996; Robinson et al., 1996). Moreover, as ethnic minority women become acculturated into the mainstream American culture, they may become more susceptible to the majority cultural value of an unrealistic thin ideal (Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2001). In a recent study, eating concerns and depressive affect emerged as significant predictors of body image for both Latina and African American women (Hrabosky & Grilo, 2007). However, there has been a dearth of research on body image in less acculturated Latinas, or more commonly, acculturation is not measured (ie, White & Grilo, 2005).

In summary, this study addressed several gaps in the literature by examining three correlates of problematic eating behaviors in a community-based sample of less acculturated Latina with subclinical eating disorders.

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