



Sociocultural and identity predictors of body dissatisfaction in ethnically diverse college women



Liya M. Rakhkovskaya, Cortney S. Warren*

Department of Psychology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 January 2015

Received in revised form 21 October 2015

Accepted 26 October 2015

Available online 20 November 2015

Keywords:

Ethnic identity
American identity
Thin-ideal internalization
Pressures for thinness
Body dissatisfaction
Ethnicity

ABSTRACT

Emerging research suggests that ethnic identity and American identity are associated with mental health in ethnic minorities and European Americans, respectively. Furthermore, although ethnic identity is associated with diminished body dissatisfaction in minority women, the relationship between American identity and body dissatisfaction is unexplored in all ethnic groups. Accordingly, this study examined the relationships among ethnic identity, American identity, thin-ideal internalization, pressures for thinness, and body dissatisfaction in 1018 ethnically diverse college women. Ethnic identity negatively predicted body dissatisfaction for African Americans, and attenuated the relationship between pressures for thinness and body dissatisfaction for African Americans and Asian Americans, but not European Americans or Latina Americans. Results for American identity were inconclusive. Findings suggest that ethnic identity may be a protective factor against eating pathology for Asian American and African American women.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

A growing body of research suggests a positive association between ethnic identity and psychological health in ethnic minorities in the United States (USA; Kiang, Witkow, Baldelomar, & Fuligni, 2010; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Umaña-Taylor, Wong, Gonzales, & Dumka, 2012). Defined as the process of identifying with one's cultural group and the acceptance of its norms and practices (Phinney, 1996), *ethnic identity* is associated with increased self-esteem (Martinez & Dukes, 1997), improved academic adjustment (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2012), diminished eating pathology, and/or diminished body dissatisfaction in ethnic minority women (Henrickson, Crowther, & Harrington, 2010; Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2014; Stein, Corte, & Ronis, 2010). For example, ethnic identity negatively correlated with disordered eating symptoms in a sample of 93 African American women (Henrickson et al., 2010) and negatively predicted binge eating and fat self-definition in an experimental study of 66 Mexican American women (Stein et al., 2010). Identification of protective factors against body dissatisfaction and eating pathology in women, such as ethnic identity, is particularly important because women are disproportionately affected by eating pathology (from 4:1 to 10:1; American

Psychiatric Association, 2013). Furthermore, adult and college-aged women in Western cultures are commonly dissatisfied with their bodies (Frederick, Peplau, & Lever, 2006; Frederick, Forbes, Grigorian, & Jarcho, 2007; Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984) and desire to be thinner (Frederick, Forbes, & Berezovskaya, 2008; Swami et al., 2010).

Theoretically, one way that ethnic identity could be protective against body dissatisfaction is by buffering the negative messages perpetuated by mainstream Western media. Specifically, media outlets in Western culture routinely portray the ideal woman as unattainably thin (i.e., the *thin ideal*; Keel & Forney, 2013; Tiggemann, 2011). According to the Sociocultural Model for eating pathology (Keel & Forney, 2013; Tiggemann, 2011), exposure to and/or awareness of the thin ideal can lead to its acceptance as personally relevant (i.e., thin-ideal internalization). In turn, thin-ideal internalization can result in pressures to become thin, to conform to a usually unattainable body ideal. Extensive research (Cafri, Yamamiya, Brannick, & Thompson, 2005; Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002; Juarascio et al., 2011; Thompson & Stice, 2001; Vartanian & Dey, 2013) suggests that *thin-ideal internalization* and *pressures for thinness* often result in body dissatisfaction (i.e., negative attitudes and perceptions of one's body weight and/or shape; Tiggemann, 2011).

Ethnic identity may attenuate thin-ideal internalization and/or pressures for thinness in ethnic minority women. Specifically, ethnic identity could make the mainstream, Western (i.e., Eurocen-

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Nevada, 4505 Maryland Parkway, Las Vegas, NV 89154, United States.
E-mail address: cortney.warren@unlv.edu (C.S. Warren).

tric) ideals less relevant. Alternatively, ethnic identity may orient women to larger, curvier body ideals, common in some ethnic minority cultures (i.e., African Americans; Overstreet, Quinn, & Agocha, 2010; Latina Americans; Warren, Gleaves, Cepeda-Benito, Fernandez, & Rodriguez-Ruiz, 2005). Notably, values for curvier body ideals could explain more favorable body image among African American women (Roberts, Cash, Feingold, & Johnson, 2006). Indeed, a recent study found that ethnic identity moderated the relationship between thin-ideal internalization and eating concerns, such that the relationship was weaker for college women with stronger ethnic identity (Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2014). However, the effects of ethnic identity on pressures for thinness remain unexplored.

Ethnic Identity and Body Dissatisfaction in European American Women

Although the protective effects of ethnic identity are well-studied among minority women (Henrickson et al., 2010; Stein et al., 2010), the nature of these relationships in European American women is unclear. On one hand, high ethnic identity in European Americans could reinforce existing sociocultural attitudes typical of White, American Western culture, including the thin ideal and subsequent body dissatisfaction. As such, high ethnic identity could be associated with higher thin-ideal internalization and/or pressures for thinness among European American women. On the other hand, it is also possible that the protective effects of ethnic identity extend to European Americans such that having a sense of belonging to a cultural group, independent from the values and ideals of that culture, is protective of mental health issues (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Warren, 2014).

Existing research on ethnic identity in European American women is sparse and conflicting (Baugh, Mullis, Mullis, Hicks, & Peterson, 2010; Phinney et al., 1997). Phinney and colleagues (1997) found that ethnic identity predicted higher self-esteem in European American adolescents. However, Baugh and colleagues (2010) found no relationship between ethnic identity and body dissatisfaction in European American women. Furthermore, research in European American women is confounded by the fact that European Americans tend to report considerably lower levels of ethnic identity than ethnic minorities (Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2014; Rodriguez, Schwartz, & Whitbourne, 2010). This floor effect suggests that European American women may not view a sense of belonging to their ethnic group as a salient construct to their identity. Consequently, ethnic identity may play little to no role in the development of body dissatisfaction in European American women because it may be less relevant to identity formation in this group.

American Identity: A New Way to Examine Cultural Belonging

Given conflicting data on body dissatisfaction and ethnic identity for European Americans, *American identity*, or a sense of identifying with and attachment to the USA (Schildkraut, 2007), may be a better way to examine cultural belonging for this group. Extant research on American identity (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos & Heng, 2009) suggests that individuals of European descent may more easily identify with belonging to the cultural values and attributes of the USA, compared to ethnic minority groups with a separate ethnic or cultural history. Devos and colleagues (2005, 2009) attribute this to the fact that, since colonial times, European Americans have represented the dominant, majority group in the USA. As such, there is a tendency for Americans of all ethnic backgrounds to implicitly identify being American with “Whiteness” (i.e., the *American = White association*; Devos &

Banaji, 2005; Devos & Heng, 2009). Accordingly, Schwartz and colleagues (2012) showed that European Americans have a higher affirmation and commitment toward the USA than other ethnic groups.

Historically, the *American = White* association likely facilitated American identity formation predominantly among European Americans. As such, for European Americans, American identity may be conceptually similar to ethnic identity in ethnic minority groups. Consequently, it may have similar positive associations with desirable mental health outcomes. In concordance with this hypothesis, a small body of research on American identity in European Americans suggests it has a positive association with self-esteem (Phinney et al., 1997) and sociocultural adaptation (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Although sparse, these findings suggest American identity may resemble ethnic identity in its protective effects. As such, the protective effect of American identity against body dissatisfaction is also theoretically possible. On the other hand, high American identity may reinforce endorsement of mainstream media pressures and internalization in women. Unfortunately, research on the effects of American identity and body dissatisfaction is lacking in all ethnic groups.

Current Study

Research on ethnic and American identity as correlates of body dissatisfaction is sparse in a number of areas. First, while extensive extant findings suggest a negative association between ethnic identity, body dissatisfaction, and/or eating pathology in minority women (Henrickson et al., 2010; Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2014; Stein et al., 2010), research examining these relationships in European American women is inconclusive (Baugh et al., 2010; Phinney et al., 1997). Second, extant research has focused exclusively on the positive psychological effects of American identity in European Americans (Berry et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 1997). Theoretically, it is possible that American identity has similar or additive protective effects for ethnic minorities. However, research on the American identity in ethnic minorities is very sparse (e.g., Devos & Heng, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2012). Third, similar to ethnic identity, American identity may also act as a protective factor against body dissatisfaction.

To address these gaps in the literature, the overarching goal of this study was to understand the relationships between ethnic identity, American identity, thin-ideal internalization, pressures for thinness, and body dissatisfaction in a large, diverse sample of college women. Specifically, we explored (1) ethnic differences in mean scores of these constructs; (2) whether ethnic and/or American identity predict body dissatisfaction above and beyond thin-ideal internalization and/or pressures for thinness; and (3) whether ethnic and/or American identity moderate the relationship between any thin-ideal internalization/pressures for thinness and body dissatisfaction in each ethnic group (i.e., European American, African American, Asian American, and Latina American). Based on a previous study examining ethnic identity (Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2014), we predicted that (a) European Americans would score lowest on ethnic identity and highest on American identity, thin-ideal internalization, pressure for thinness, and body dissatisfaction; (b) ethnic identity would moderate the relationships between thin-ideal internalization/pressures for thinness and body dissatisfaction, such that the relationship would be diminished for women with stronger ethnic identity; and (c) these relationships would be significant for ethnic minority participants (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latina Americans), but not for European Americans. Given the lack of research on the relationship between American identity and body dissatisfaction, we made no predictions on its role in these models.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/902759>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/902759>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)