

THE EFFECT OF BODY IMAGE ON SELF-ESTEEM ACROSS ETHNICITY

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The different effects of body area satisfaction on self-esteem in black and white females were observed during this study. Body area satisfaction was measured using the Body Area Satisfaction Subscale (BASS) and self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSE). It was hypothesized that females with higher levels of body area satisfaction would have higher levels of self-esteem, and that black females would have higher levels of body area satisfaction than white females. These hypotheses were based upon research showing the effects of culture identity, body image, and self-concept. The results did not indicate a significant difference between the body area satisfactions of black and white females. Findings did indicate a strong positive correlation between the body area satisfaction and self-esteem of white females, but not black females.

Over the past ten to twelve years there has been an increase of study in the area of self-concept and self-esteem. Self-concept is a multidimensional construct, including the dimension of self-worth. Self-worth is the value one has for his or herself, often times referred to as self-esteem. Some researchers have used self-description as another dimension in evaluating self-concept. Self-concept and self-esteem are often used interchangeably, because self-concept encompasses self-worth (“Body Attitude”, 2001). However, self-concept includes an individual’s overall perception of their psychological and physiological being, where as self-esteem is the judgment of worth an individual assigns to his or herself. In the areas of self-concept and self-esteem there has been a particular emphasis on college students in their second years of studies. In this population self-esteem appears to correlate with body image (the overall perception an individual has about their physical body), which has in turn been found to have a strong correlation with an individual’s self-concept (Von Bergen & Soper, 1996). The motivation of much of this research is the finding that self-esteem and self-concept have been found to correlate with human behavior, specifically eating disorders. Therefore much of this research has been targeted towards finding an antidote to the correlation between low self-esteem and clinical eating disorders. In particular, research has focused directly on the correlations of gender and ethnicity.

Von Bergen and Soper (1996) reported that individuals with high self-esteem tend to have high self-concepts, whereas individuals with low self-esteem tend to have self-concepts that are inconsistent and frequently changing. Participants in their study were tested using the Revised Janis-Field Self-Esteem Scale. They concluded that individuals with low self-esteem tend to be affected more by external factors such as media as well as their achievements (“Body Attitude”, 2001; Von Bergen & Soper, 1996). The authors suggested that these findings exist because these individuals are not as certain about their own self-identity. This trend was not noted in individuals with high self-esteem.

Evidence has been found that suggests a relation between an individual’s body image, self-esteem, and self-concept. Many factors are related to an individual’s self-concept, but self-worth (esteem) has been found to have great significance in this area. Negative body image tends to correlate with negative behavior towards one’s self (“Body Attitude”, 2001). Negative behaviors would include those behaviors that typically lead to clinical eating disorders.

Research by Nigel Barber (2001) reported that experimentally-induced depression affected the self-perception of males and females regardless of ethnicity. Participants’ moods were altered using the Velten procedure, which is a series of sixty statements. The series consists of neutral, depressive, or elating statements. Participants were tested in all three categories. Individuals whose moods reflected depression tended to feel physically heavier in comparison to the other individuals. The ideal goal for males in the study was to be heavier, and for females the exact opposite. This heaviness and lightness was a reflection of how they perceived their current body weight as a result of the induced moods.

In general, females are affected more by body image and self-concept than males (Henriques & Calhoun, 1999). Self-concept is learned, and is consistent in both males and females until their adolescent years. After adolescent years self-concept and age have a negative correlation in females; the older an individual gets the lower one’s self-concept. Media, health, fashion, and beauty industries have been credited the most for this trend. Beauty is the most important factor in advertising targeted towards females, whereas males are also valued for their success and achievements (“Body Attitude”, 2001; Von Bergen & Soper, 1996).

Although females have been found to be at risk more than males for negative behavior surrounding self-concept and body image, white females are more likely to be victims of this phenomenon than black females (Falconer & Neville, 2000; Henriques & Calhoun, 1999). White females have a tendency to associate self-concept with weight, shape, and appearance (Henriques & Calhoun, 1999). In comparison, black females rely more on internal aspects when developing self-concepts. Even when evaluating actual physical characteristics, black females tend to focus on specific aspects of their body features instead of their overall body image, for example buttocks, hips, and body shape. Black females have been described as “working with what they have,” instead of trying to obtain the ideal beauty presented by the media (Faulkner & Neville, 2000).

Research has been steadily increasing in the area of self-concept across culture and gender boundaries, but less focus has been on specific ethnic groups, particularly on blacks. Falconer and Neville (2000) conducted research to determine if the differences between black female and white female self-concepts actually existed, and why the self-concepts of black females were different from those of their white counterparts. Their research showed that black females were indeed dissatisfied with heavier body weight, which correlated with lower body image. The same correlation had been found in white females (Henriques & Calhoun, 1999). The difference that lies between black females and white females is that black females are less likely to engage in negative behavior toward themselves because of this lower body image (Falconer & Neville, 2000).

Although black females are affected by lower body image, they still had higher self-concepts than white females. There are several contributors to this finding. Black females tend to reject external standards of beauty, essentially in an effort to protect their self-esteem. Falconer and Neville (2000) have directly related this to a worldview that is specific to the black community. An African Self-Consciousness (ASC) scale was used to measure the black female participants' identity with African descent and the Body-Areas Satisfaction Subscale (BASS) to measure satisfaction with particular body parts. There was a correlation between higher ASC and BASS scores and a higher self-concept. The black community tends to identify more with its African heritage which emphasis larger body features, such as breast, lips, buttocks, and shapely bodies. As a whole the community is more favorable to these larger features. Satisfaction and self-concept are usually generated around these features instead of body image as a whole. Therefore, black females tend not to be greatly affected by the white media beauty ideals that are projected. However, higher-class black females identify more with their white female counterparts and problems relating to self-concept (Falconer & Neville, 2000).

Research in the area of self-concept has provided new insight to the links between ethnicity, body image, and self-concept. Research has been consistent in finding that body image, self-esteem, and self-concept are correlated to some extent. All three elements combined directly affect white females more than white males, black males, and black females (Henriques & Calhoun, 1999).

An issue that has not been addressed in this past research is whether specific body area satisfaction (the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with individual body parts) has the same correlation with self-esteem for white females, as it appears to have with self-esteem for black females. The focus of this study is the correlation of body area satisfaction and self-esteem in both white and black females. Body area satisfaction will be assessed using the Body Area Satisfaction Subscale (BASS) and self-esteem will be assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) scale. It was hypothesized that females with higher levels of body area satisfaction would have higher levels of self-esteem, and that black females would have higher levels of body area satisfaction than white females. Although past research has not shown a significant difference in body image between white and black females, it has been found that higher levels of body area satisfaction in black females correlates with higher self-concepts and self-worth (esteem). Falconer and Neville (2000) related body area satisfaction in black females to a worldview specific to the black community, African Self-Consciousness. The prediction that the body area satisfaction of black females will be higher than those of white females is due to the culture identity, which is exclusive to the black community.

Methods

Participants

Twenty-six female students from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte participated in this study. There were 13 white females and 13 black females. The participants were either in their first or second year of study and between the ages of 18 and 20.

The majority of the participants were in a general psychology lab seeking research participation credit. Overall the individuals had little to no knowledge of previous research on body area satisfaction and self-esteem. The participants had a variety of body shapes and weights. Body area satisfaction ranged from 15-30 and self-esteem ranged from 10-26.

Design and Materials

This study was conducted as a 2x2 factorial design. The two variables were ethnicity and body area satisfaction. Ethnicity had two levels, black females and white female. Body area satisfaction scores could range from 9-45, scores closer to 9 indicated higher levels of body area satisfaction, and scores closer to 45 indicated lower levels of body area satisfaction. Self-esteem was the dependent variable. Self-esteem scores could range from 10-40, scores closer to 40 indicated higher self-esteem, and scores closer to 10 indicated lower self-esteem. The Body Area Satisfaction Subscale (BASS) was used to assess body area satisfaction (Falconer & Neville, 2000). This subscale consisted of nine items, which could be rated from 1-5, 1 being very satisfied and 5 being very dissatisfied. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) Scale was used to assess self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). There were ten items on this scale. Each item was rated from 1-4, 1 being strongly agree and 4 being strongly disagree.

Procedure

Participants were informed that their results would remain anonymous and confidential during and after the study. Participants were given both the BASS and RSE scale to complete (*see Appendix*). Before completing either scale participants were asked to mark their ethnicity, age, and which body feature they individually valued the most. They were then asked to complete the BASS first followed by the RSE Scale. This was to ensure that their self-esteem assessment did not interfere with their body area satisfaction assessment. Upon completion of the scales, participants were asked to place the scales in a folder by the door. Participants were then given background information on research in the area of body area satisfaction, self-esteem, and ethnicity, as well as the present studies variables and hypotheses.

Results

The scores for the BASS could range from 9-45 and the scores for the RSE could range from 10-40. The BASS scores of the black female participants ranged from 12-30 and the RSE scores ranged from 14-26. The BASS scores of the white female participants ranged from 16-26 and the RSE scores ranged from 11-23.

Pearson Correlations were computed to determine if there was a correlation between both white and black female scores on body area satisfaction and self-esteem, neither significance nor strong correlation was found, $r=.304$. An independent t-test was calculated to examine any effect of race on body area satisfaction. Table 1 shows that the body area satisfaction of white females ($M=21.54$, $SD=3.20$) and black females ($M=19.77$, $SD=4.85$) did not significantly differ from one another, $t(24)=1.097$, $p=.283$.

When Pearson correlations examining the relation between body area satisfaction and self-esteem per group were computed, separately for black and white females, white females were found to have a significantly positive correlation between the two, $r=.784$, $p=.002$. There was not a significant correlation found between body area satisfaction and self-esteem for black females, $r=-.020$, $p=.949$ (see Table 2).

Discussion

The goal in this study was to examine the correlation between body area satisfaction and self-esteem in both black and white females. The hypotheses were that females with higher levels of body area satisfaction would have higher levels of self-esteem, and that black females would have higher levels of

body area satisfaction than white females. When testing for a correlation between body area satisfaction and self-esteem across both black and white females no correlation was found. There was also no significant difference in the mean scores of body area satisfaction between black and white females. These results do not support the aforementioned hypotheses. Although these hypotheses were not supported a strong positive correlation between body area satisfaction and self-esteem was found to be true for white females.

These results are consistent with previous research showing that self-esteem does not differ between white females and black females, nor does overall body image, specifically in college females. Previous studies have shown it is not necessarily one ethnic group that has a higher body image than the other, but it is the influence that body image has on self-esteem and in turn on self-concept that varies the most. The self-concepts of white females are found to have a greater correlation with lower body image and self-esteem than those of black females (Barber 2001; Henriques & Calhoun, 1999; Von Bergen & Soper, 1996). Research has suggested that this is because the specific cultural identity of black females plays a large role in their assessment of body image, where as white females rely heavily on media images ((Falconer & Neville, 2000; "Body Attitude", 2001).

Although there was no distinct variation in body area satisfaction between groups, the correlation between body area satisfaction and self-esteem found in white females, further supports research that has found correlations between self-concept, body image, and self-esteem has a greater significance when pertaining to white females, than their black counterparts ((Falconer & Neville, 2000).

Results from this study may have differed had there been a larger sample size of both white and black females. This may have allowed more inferences to be made on the data as well as the prevalence of stronger correlations between body area satisfaction and self-esteem. It may have led to more insight regarding the impact in ethnicity truly holds on body image. Although the sample size was small its, findings were consistent with those from previous research in the area of body image, self-esteem, and self-concept.

One aspect that was not taken into account during this study was the culture identity or African Self-Consciousness of the black female participants in this study. The participants were from a majority white institution. It may be possible that their white counterparts have influence on their own bodily perceptions as Falconer and Neville (2000) found with higher-class black females. The presence or absence of cultural identity in these black females may be correlated with the differences found between BASS and RSE scores in white and black female participants.

Further research may involve the direct relation between body area satisfaction and overall body image. It may be possible to increase an individual's own body area satisfaction, which may lead to an increase of body image. From previous research indicating the correlation between body image and self-esteem, this may very well raise one's self-esteem and increase self-concept. This increase of self-concept may result in a decrease of eating disorders that females, particularly white females, tend to engage in as a result of poor self-concept.

References

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Table 1

Mean Scores of Body Area Satisfaction

Race	Body Area Satisfaction	
	Mean	Standard Deviation
Black	21.54	3.20
White	19.77	4.85

Note: No significant difference, $p=.283$.

Table 2

Intercorrelations Between Subscales for Black and White Females

Ethnic Group	Pearson Correlation between BASS and RSE
Black Females (n=13)	-.020
White Females (n=13)	.784*
Black and White Females (n=26)	.304

Note: * indicates significant correlation, $p = .002$

Appendix

PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION BY PLACING A CHECK MARK BESIDE THE RESPONSE THAT APPLIES TO YOU.

Race: Black White **Age:** 15-17 18-20 21 or above

Which one of the following features is the most important to you:

face breast buttocks stomach legs thighs hips arms

Directions. Using the following 5-point scale below, please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

1 = *Very Satisfied*

2 = *Mostly Satisfied*

3 = *Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied*

4 = *Mostly Dissatisfied*

5 = *Very Dissatisfied*

1. Face (facial features, complexion) ____
2. Hair (color, thickness, texture) ____
3. Lower torso (buttocks, hips, thighs, legs)____
4. Mid torso (waist, stomach) ____
5. Upper torso (chest or breasts, shoulders, arms) __
6. Muscle Tone ____
7. Weight ____
8. Height ____
9. Overall appearance ____

Please answer each question as honestly as possible by circling one of the four possible responses. ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS.

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

9. I certainly feel useless at times.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

10. At times I think I am no good at all.

