Abstract

Introduction: This study explored sociocultural, parental, and peer influences on body image in female college students at a large public southwestern university.

Methods: An exploratory, cross-sectional Internet survey design canvassed 218 college women, who were members of Pan-Hellenic sororities at a large public southwestern university. The ages ranged from 18-21 and the majority of this sample was Caucasian. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were used for data analysis.

Results: Mom’s concern that her daughter might become too fat was negatively correlated with weight-related body image (BE- Weight subscale) ($r = - .34, p < .05$). Physical appearance comparison was negatively related to appearance-related body image (BE- Appearance subscale) ($r = - .35, p < .05$). Additionally, physical appearance comparison was positively correlated with the SATAQ ($r = .52, p < .05$). High levels of sociocultural attitudes were moderately and negatively correlated with appearance-related body image ($r = -.46, p < .05$) and weight-related body image ($r = -.40, p < .05$).

Conclusions: Participants with a lower weight-related body image perceived that their mother was greatly concerned about them becoming too fat and were highly influenced by sociocultural attitudes (media). Participants with a lower appearance-related body image were more likely to engage in physical appearance comparison and more likely to be affected by sociocultural attitudes (media). These findings may motivate health care professionals to assess for body image disturbance and facilitate programs that increase awareness and educate young women about desirable, healthy attitudes toward weight and body image, particularly within greek college communities.

Keywords: body image, women, sociocultural influences, parents, peers