THE RELATIONSHIP OF BMI AND ETHNICITY WITH BODY IMAGE IN COLLEGE FEMALES

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**Purpose:** Body image is an important area of study since a negative body image can lead to many negative physical and psychological health consequences, especially during young adulthood and in females. There are many possible contributing factors to variations in body image perception, including body mass index (BMI) and ethnicity. The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationships between BMI, ethnicity, and body image in college females. Research questions were: 1) what is the relationship between BMI and body image in college females; and 2) controlling for BMI, is there a significant difference, by ethnicity, in body image in college females?

**Methods:** The study design was a self-report survey, using data from a convenience sample (n=110) recruited through organizations on the UT Austin campus. Inclusion criteria were being female, between the ages of 18-22, and current students at UT Austin. Instruments included a demographic questionnaire with ethnicity and self-reported weight and height and the Body Shape Questionnaire-16A (BSQ).

**Findings:** About a third of participants were Hispanic/ Latino (31.8%) and Caucasian (30.9%); other ethnicities that participants identified with were Asian/Pacific Islander (18.2%), Black/African American (17.3%), and other (1.8%). The BMI ranged from 17 to 41, with a mean of 22.76 (SD=3.96). The majority of participants were in the normal BMI range; the other BMI categories that participants represented were underweight (8.2%), overweight (14.5%), and obese (5.5%). An overall mean for the BSQ questionnaire of 43.63 (SD=16.11). There was a statistically significant, moderately strong, positive correlation between BMI and body image (r=0.46; p<0.001). Asian/Pacific Islander had the lowest BSQ-16 mean score (39.5), Caucasian had the highest (50.3), and Black/African American (41.1) and Hispanic/Latino (42.4) were in between. A score of less than 38 indicated no concern with body image, 38 to 51 indicated a mild concern with body image, 52 to 66 indicated a moderate concern with body image, and above 66 indicated a marked concern with body image. An ANCOVA test, controlling for BMI, determined that there was no statistically significant difference between body image scores by ethnicity (p=0.13).

**Conclusions:** Results indicated that there was a positive correlation between increasing body mass index and decreasing body image, which extends prior findings. The results for ethnicity in relation to body image differed from those previous studies that indicated a difference in body image between ethnicities. Although prior research on this question had mixed results. Further research needs to be conducted in this area in order to understand these relationships.

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