Body Image, Disordered Eating, and Self-Esteem in Black Women: Observing the Influence of the Racial Composition of Both Academic and Social Environments

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Introduction

- Black women have significantly higher self-esteem when compared to other racial groups and genders (Sprecher, Brooks, & Avogo, 2013)

- Black women have a more positive body image than their White and/or Hispanic counterparts (Altabe, 1998)

- However, Black women have still encountered disturbances with body size and shape (Capodilupo, & Kim, 2014)

- The difference between disordered eating symptoms in White, Hispanic, and Asian women versus Black women is only marginally significant (Kelly, Cotter, & Mazzeo, 2012)

- A higher sense of ethnic identity, and subsequently less internalization of Western beauty standards, has a strong negative correlation with body dissatisfaction as well as with disordered eating symptoms (Awad, Kashubeck-West, Bledman, Coker, Stinson, & Mintz, 2020)

- Racist-stress appraisals had significant negative outcomes on mental health specifically with regard to depressive symptoms, and to a smaller degree, on self-esteem in Black women at PWIs (Jones, Cross, & DeFour, 2016).

Purpose: This study attempts to understand the affect that environmental factors related to social comparison (i.e. academic and social networks) have on not only body image and disordered eating, but also self-esteem.

Hypotheses: Black women who attend HBCUs or who attend educational institutions with higher rates of enrollment of Black students will have higher self-esteem and body image, will have higher satisfaction with their skin tone and hair, will be less focused on losing weight, and will have lower disordered eating attitudes compared to those who do not attend HBCUS, even when accounting for ethnic centrality and nationalism.

Method

Measures

- Sample (n=134) collected using social media advertising and cold contacting

- Body Image measured with three subscales of the Body Self Image Questionnaire Short Form (BSIQ-SF): Overall Appearance Evaluation, Fatness Evaluation, and Social Dependence (Social Comparison)

- Disordered Eating measured with Disordered Eating Attitudes Scale (DEAS)

- Self-Esteem measured with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

- Racial Composition of Academic and Social Networks, Focus on Losing Weight, and Skin Tone and Hair Satisfaction were measured by Likert scale questions relating to each construct; scores were created for both Social Network and Focus on Losing Weight

- Social Network scores were grouped into three categories: low, medium, and high for ANOVA analyses.

Method Cont.

Statistical Analyses

- The association between racial composition of academic and social networks and self-esteem, disordered eating, body image and focus on losing weight was evaluated using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests

- Relationships between racial composition of academic and social networks and skin tone and hair satisfaction were evaluated using a Chi-Square Test of Independence

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Multivariate linear regressions were used to examine social network's power as a predictor when accounting for ethnic centrality and nationalism

- Self-esteem was also observed as a control variable when social network composition was tested as a predictor for body-image and disordered eating measures.

Results

	Overall Appearance Evaluation	Social Dependence	Fatness Evaluation	Feelings toward Eating	Restrictive and Compensatory Practices	Concerns with Food and Weight Gain	Self-Esteem
Social Network	-.180*	-0.037	0.015	-0.181	-0.055	-0.044	0.294***
Self-Esteem	.385***	-.516***	-.283**	-0.076	-0.186*	-0.174	-

When controlling for Black centrality, Black nationalism, and self-esteem, results indicated that social network composition negatively predicts overall appearance evaluation (β= -.180, p=.04) and marginally feeling towards eating (β=-.181, p=.06), while it positively predicts self-esteem (β= .294, p=.001). Further, self-esteem negatively predicts social dependence (β=-.516, p<.0001), positively predicts overall appearance evaluation (β=.385, p<.0001), and negatively predicts fatness evaluation (β=-.283, p=.002). It also negatively predicts "restrictive and compensatory practices" (β=-.186, p=.04) and marginally predicts "concerns with food and weight gain" (β=-.174, p=.06). Black nationalism was also found to marginally predict self-esteem (β=.150, p=.09).

Discussion

- Friendships with other Black persons have a significant influence on Black women's self-esteem and body image

- Black women's concept of satisfactory overall appearance may be more dependent on factors outside of body size, skin-tone, and hair quality

- Black women in this sample did not have a significant focus on losing weight regardless of the racial composition of their institution

Discussion Cont.

Limitations

- The Disordered Eating Attitude Scale (DEAS) overall score could not be fully measured as one scale item was left out of the survey by mistake. However, all of the subscales of the DEAS used in this study did not include the missing item, and thus could be evaluated normally.

- After the first 30 responses, the questions observing the highest level of parental and participant education were expanded to include a write-in option for those who had not achieved a High School GED or diploma. Moreover, the question observing motivations for adopting a specific diet, for the first 30 responses, had originally been a force-response question but later a N/A option was added.

- One option on the Likert scale for one of the DEAS questions was left out for the first 30 responses, but was corrected subsequently.

- Additionally, one item of the BSIQ-SF scale was worded differently than the original scale, however the responses were kept as is, since this wording did not detract from the intended meaning of the item.

Future Research

- Explore more about the protective role that Black women's social networks play specifically in the development of sense of self and body image, and how the role of these networks change based on their composition (i.e. family vs. friends vs. mentors, etc.)

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Investigate what are the factors lead to overall appearance satisfaction in Black women

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Explore how Black women cope with body image disturbances and disordered eating

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