

College Women's Body Image: Comparing HBCU and PWI

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Albany State University

Located in Albany GA (Southwestern GA)

4 year public university

Historically Black College and University

Total Enrollment: 4,176

Female Enrollment: 2,840

Ethnic Breakdown: 90% African American,
8% Caucasian, 2% Other

Valdosta State University

Located in Valdosta GA (Southwestern GA)

4 year public university

Predominately White Institution

Total Enrollment: 12,391

Female Enrollment: 7,577

Ethnic Breakdown: 65% Caucasian, 28%
African American, 7% Other

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study was to obtain information from college-age women (age 18-25) from a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) and a Predominately White College Institution (PWI) with regard to their body image, body shape, appearance, and related factors

Literature Background

Abrams, Allen, and Gray (1993) found that Caucasian college-age women were more likely to restrain eating, use laxatives and binge and purge **than AA** college-age women.

AA women and girls are **more tolerant of being overweight**, tend to diet less frequently and perceive themselves to be less overweight than Caucasian women do (Wilson, Sargent, & Dias, 1994).

Literature Background

Thompson (1994) -among AA who attended predominately Caucasian schools, they saw thinness as dominant versus those who went to racially mixed or **predominately AA schools where there was a wider range of body acceptance.**

Thompson also found that AA women who grew up and went to school in predominantly **AA communities** report having a **more positive body image** than AA women who grew up in predominately Caucasian communities.

Literature Background

Neff Sargent, McKeown, Jackson, and Valois (1997) concluded that body size perceptions, desired body weight and weight control behaviors **differed by race**.

Nielson (2000) found that **90% of AA women** and 45% of Caucasian women reported being “very satisfied” with their weight.

Orenstein (2000), found that AA females at a **predominantly AA school did not experience** the pressures of being thin and did not feel that body image was a problem.

Literature Background

Petersons, Rojhoni, Steinhaus, & Larkin, (2000)- Identification and a strong connection to the AA community have **protected** AA women from developing a negative body image

Wildes, Emery, & Simons, (2001)-found an overall theme that Caucasian women had greater eating disturbances and body dissatisfaction **than AA women**.

Arugete, Nickleberry and Yates (2004) researched women's body image at a HBCU and found that **AA women tended to desire the body size they considered healthy**.

Literature Background

Kennedy, Templeton, Gandhi, & Gorzalka, (2004)- our cultural environment in which **we live forms** the context in which our body dissatisfaction develops.

Jung and Lee (2006) stated that the level of body dissatisfaction that we experience is **highly influenced** by the cultural environment in which we live.

Research

This research is based on the previous idea that the environment (cultural and ethnic) that one lives in and identifies with plays a role in how they feel about their bodies.

- We studied African American women's body image and related issues based on their matriculation at either at a HBCU or a PWI.

Participants

18-to-25 year old female college students

Two public universities located in the Southeastern United States.

Historically Black College (HBCU) and a Predominately White Institution (PWI)

651 surveys for analysis,

383 from the HBCU

268 from the PWI

Study Instrument

Quantitative survey

Young Women's Experiences with Body Weight and Shape.

Developed in 1997 by Delaney, O'Keefe, and Skene.

- Cronbach's alphas on all five factors ranged from 0.63-0.93, indicating a sufficient level of reliability for all five factors (factor 1-.92, factor 2-.93, factor 3-.82, factor 4-.63, and factor 5-.65)
- Was developed based on interviews with women from the general population and the experiences they encountered on a daily basis about their body image

Study Instrument

49 questions

Scored on a 5-point likert scale, (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly Agree).

Divided into 5 subscales:

- **Factor 1-** Weight Dissatisfaction
- **Factor 2-** Slimness as Quality of Life
- **Factor 3-** Interpersonal Messages Regarding Slimness
- **Factor 4-** Rejecting Societal Value of Thinness
- **Factor 5-** Valuing Exercise

Results

Subscale	HBCU M	PWI M	HBCU SD	PWI SD	HBCU Range/Max	PWI Range/Max
1 Weight Dissatisfaction	32.33	34.79	12.51	11.31	48.00/60	48.00/60
2 Slimness as Quality of Life	41.83	49.39	15.18	15.09	76.00/95	76.00/95
3 Interpersonal Messages Regarding Slimness	17.96	21.74	6.82	7.93	40.00/50	40.00/50
4 Rejecting Societal Value of Thinness	12.36	12.70	3.69	3.21	16.00/20	16.00/20
5 Valuing Exercise	12.23	12.17	3.18	2.93	16.00/20	16.00/20

Analysis of Variance Between 5 Subscales- Alpha (p) = .05

Subscale	Sum of Squares	Df	F	p
1 Weight Dissatisfaction	953.73	1	6.58	.010
2 Slimness as Quality of Life	9026.63	1	39.34	.000
3 Interpersonal Messages Regarding Slimness	2250.80	1	42.18	.000
4 Rejecting Societal Value of Thinness	17.79	1	1.45	.229
5 Valuing Exercise	.447	1	.047	.828

Based on previous research, we believed that these two groups would differ on **factors 1** (Weight Dissatisfaction) and **2** (Slimness as Quality of Life) but have similar results on **factors 3** (Interpersonal Messages Regarding Slimness), **4** (Rejecting Societal Value of Thinness), and **5** (Valuing Exercise).

The results supported our hypothesis that the two groups would differ on factors 1 and 2 and would not differ on factors 4 and 5.

However, the fact that the results showed a statistically significant difference for Factor 3 did not support our initial hypothesis.

Implications for Health Education

Can provide a better understanding of how AA college age women (matriculating at different ethnic schools) develop their personal sense of body image and body satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Can provide valuable information when counseling/educating AA women on body image.

Aid in the development of health education and promotion programs that address body image in the AA culture based on the level of acculturation involved.

Future Research Ideas

More in depth questions on body image development (qualitative study).

Measure students actual knowledge and behaviors about nutrition and physical activity with implication on overall body image.

How knowledge could change or impact behaviors.