Minority Females & the Thin Ideal: Ethnic versus Mainstream Fashion Magazines and Their Effects on Acculturation & Body Image in Young Black & Latino Women

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Introduction
Women, Culture, Body Image & Media

Young women in our society are daily bombarded with mediated female images that represent the dominant culture's definition of beauty. These slender, flawless prototypes stare down from billboards and up from the pages of fashion magazines, sending a message: Thin is in. Research suggests that young women, in particular, listen to this message. In a 2002 survey of 81,247 Minnesota high school students, more than half the females said they had engaged in disordered behavior -- fasting, popping diet pills, smoking, vomiting, abusing laxatives, binge eating – while trying to lose weight (Orenstein, 2010).

Psychologists call this belief that society will validate women for maintaining a slim physique "thin idealization" -- the learned tendency to regard thinness as a measure of a woman's beauty, often corresponding with stigmatization of obesity (Sypeck, Gray, & Ahrens, 2004). Research has linked thin-ideal imagery in popular mass media to negative body image as well as eating disorders, including anorexia and bulimia.[1] A meta-analysis of 25 controlled experiments (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002) found that participants experienced lower body satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-confidence after being exposed

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[1] According to the National Eating Disorders Association, as many as 10 million women and girls in the United Sates battle an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia. Statistics from the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders identify the typical age of onset as between ages 16 and 20.

to media images of thin, idealized women, and were more likely to describe negative affect and increased eating disorder symptoms.

Not all women respond to the hegemonic image of the thin ideal in the same way, however. The socio-cultural model of eating pathology predicts that both Latino and African-American women should be at lower risk than white females for eating disorders because these minority groups experience less cultural pressure to be thin (Shaw, Ramirez, Trost, Randall, & Stice, 2004; Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1986; Wilfley, Schrieber, Striegel-Moore, Pike, Wright, & Rodin, 1996). Research has found that these minority females are less likely than white females to practice weight control measures, with black females less likely than Latinas to engage in weight control (Chao, Pisetsky, Dierker, Dohm, Rosselli, May, & Striegel-Moore, 2008).

A number of national studies also suggest that black and Latino women have less body dissatisfaction and heavier body ideals than their white counterparts (Flynn & Fitzgibbon, 1996; Kemper, Sargent, Drane, Wanzer, Valois, & Hussey, 1994; Neff, Sargent, McKeown, Jackson & Valois, 1997; Winkelby, Gardner, & Taylor, 1996). In addition, the highest rate of obesity -- defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or above -- in the U.S., 39 percent, occurs among non-Hispanic black women (Obesity Society, 2011). National statistics also show that young Latinas are more prone to obesity than young white women **(**Harrington, 2008).

 Shaw et al. (2004), however, indicate that these ethnicity-based differences in body satisfaction may be declining. Racial or ethnic status may no longer confer a

protective benefit for bulimia, anorexia, and related eating pathologies as the dominant

society's cultural values, conveyed through mainstream media, reach all ethnic groups.

Media images of extremely thin women and messages about the value of thinness as an

indicator of interpersonal and financial success, as well as information about how to

achieve this body type, may be creating heightened pressure toward thinness among young

minority women (Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2001; Wilfley & Rodin, 1995). Yet African

Americans have access to an array of media products developed specifically for their

racial/ethnic group. Likewise, Latinos can find a range of newspapers and magazines

published for their demographic, or watch programming produced by Telemundo or

Televisa.

Studies suggest that ethnic minorities who consume ethnic media will be less

acculturated to the norms of the dominant Anglo society and more entrenched in the

values and standards of their culture of origin, including beauty standards (Landrine &

Klonoff, 1996). The research described here seeks to explore this complex relationship by

examining young black and Latino women's engagement with the idealized beauty

imagery that is highlighted in most mainstream media, their attitudes toward their bodies,

and their overall media consumption habits. The research questions addressed include:

1) How is race/ethnicity associated with young minority females' acceptance of the thin ideal, as presented in the mainstream media?

2) How is race/ethnicity associated with young minority females' attitudes toward their bodies, or their body image?

3) How is race/ethnicity associated with young minority females' overall media use?

Second-Level Agenda Setting &
<u>**the Thin Ideal "Attribute"**</u>

The social science theory of agenda setting maps the transfer of salience from the

mass media's pictures of the world to the pictures in our heads, to paraphrase the eminent

columnist and scholar Walter Lippmann (1922). As communication scholar Maxwell

McCombs (2004) notes, the central theoretical idea of agenda setting is that the elements

central to the media's presentation of the world will become central to their audience's

understanding of the world as well. Traditionally, agenda setting studies have focused on

an agenda of public issues. Theoretically, however, these agendas can be composed of

most any set of elements, including issues, competing institutions, individuals, etc. Thus,

a second level of agenda setting, one that focuses on the attributes of these "attitude

objects," has evolved. According to this second, or attribute, level of agenda setting, each

object on the media agenda has numerous attributes, or characteristics and properties,

which fill out the picture of that object. In addition, just as objects vary in importance, or

salience, so do their attributes. According to McCombs (2004):

> These attributes, of course, can vary widely in their scope, from such
> narrow descriptions as "left-handed" to such broad descriptions as "literary
> genius." In agenda-setting theory, attribute is a generic term encompassing the
> entire range of properties and traits that characterize an object (p. 70).

Second-level agenda setting suggests that if the vast majority of young women

featured in fashion displays, television, and movies -- the attitude objects here -- share

similar attributes (flawless skin and a slim physique, for instance), these traits will appear

salient to young female readers and audience members. If the attributes of women

featured prominently in dominant media are so circumscribed, the readers'/audience's

notions of beauty will be limited as well.   Research suggests that second-level agenda

setting takes place when young women are exposed to beauty-oriented content. A study

of female college students revealed that exposure to idealized images in advertising raised

participants' comparison standards for attractiveness and lowered their satisfaction with

their own appearance (Richins, 1991).   Similarly, Stice and Shaw (1994) determined that

females who looked at photos of thin models were more dissatisfied with their bodies than

those who looked at pictures of plus-size models.

Ethnic Minorities & Acculturation

Culture is a broad term, describing how individuals expect to behave and interact.

Culture provides a social-cognitive framework individuals can use to interpret the world

around them (Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2001). Ethnicity, on the other hand, is a

narrower term. Members of an ethnic group may share certain features or traits, including

language, which set them apart from the dominant culture.   Ethnicity may be related to

race, but the two are not synonymous. For instance, Latinos may be white or black.

Ethnic minority groups in the U.S. refer to populations within the country that are

members of non-dominant groups of non-European descent (Smolak & Striegel-Moore,

2001).

The concept of acculturation has emerged as a way of explaining and

understanding ethnic differences (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Culture change refers to

the process through which ethnic/cultural minority group members move from their

culture of origin to increasingly spending time in the dominant Anglo-American culture

(Cachelin, Phinney, & Schug, 2006). Acculturation refers to the extent to which ethnic-cultural minorities retain their traditional culture versus adopting the culture of the dominant Anglo society. Acculturation research has been conducted using two models – unidimensional and bidimensional. The more widely used bidimensional model measures the extent to which people are immersed in their indigenous culture as independent from their assimilation into the dominant culture. This approach divides ethnic minority individuals into four groups: traditional, or those who are immersed solely in their culture of origin; acculturated, or those solely immersed in the dominant Anglo culture; bicultural, those immersed in both; and marginalized, those not immersed in either (Cachelin et al., 2006).

Traditional ethnic/racial minorities differ significantly from Caucasians on a variety of behaviors, but acculturated minorities typically do not (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Much research has focused on differences between acculturated and traditional minorities on a range of health-related behaviors (Landrine & Klonoff, 2004), including disordered eating and related pathologies. For instance, studies suggest that acculturation may play a role in the development of eating disorders and related symptoms among Mexican-American women (Cachelin et al., 2006; Chamorro & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Joiner & Kashubeck, 1996; Kuba & Harris, 2001; Lester & Petrie, 1995). Fewer studies have examined the link between acculturation and body image/eating pathology among black women. Edwards-Hewitt and Gray (1993), however, found the highest rate of disordered eating symptoms among bicultural black women, who identified with both black

American culture and mainstream Anglo culture and had learned how to function in both environments.

Method
Participants

A survey was deemed the appropriate investigative method to collect data sufficient for the purposes of this study. Both research and anecdotal evidence suggested that high school-age girls would be ideal participants. Academic studies often involve college students for reasons of practicality and convenience. However, many college women have moved away from home and their neighborhoods of origin. In this case, reaching young women who still lived within ethnically homogenous neighborhoods was preferred. The study site was Dallas, Texas, and the researcher focused on high schools in South Dallas to locate survey participants. South Dallas high schools were preferred because of the unique demographic makeup of this section of the city.

The Trinity River, which flows through downtown Dallas, has long been perceived as the dividing line between the affluent, primarily Anglo northern section of the city and the economically troubled, minority-dominated southern half (Schutze, 1986). A rough indicator of this disparity appeared in a 2004 *Dallas Morning News* article: In 2003, the median value of a single-family home in North Dallas was $150,000. In South Dallas, it was $58,000 (Shah, 2004). This imbalance has existed for decades, but it has received national media attention recently, thanks to an ongoing *Dallas Morning News* editorial project that sheds light on longstanding structural problems in the city's southern sector.

When the series won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing, the newspaper was praised for its "relentless editorials deploring the stark social and economic disparity between the city's better-off northern half and distressed southern half" (Young, 2010). Thus, the city's largest concentration of high schools with majority ethnic minority populations can be found in South Dallas. Therefore, female high school students in the Dallas Independent School District, especially those in South Dallas schools, were sought out as study participants.

Before the survey was administered, the instrument was pre-tested with focus groups culled from one private school and several public schools in Richardson, a Dallas suburb that also has a large ethnic minority population (these schools were not included in the final survey sample). The girls in the focus groups ranged in age from 13 to 18, and the pretesting occurred during February and March of 2007. The survey instrument was tested for reliability: Was the language used in the questions accessible/clear to the teen respondents? Did the majority of respondents interpret questions consistently, or in the same way? Pretests also were used to gauge the survey instrument's validity: For instance, did questions elicit the information they were intended to, or did they yield responses that were redundant or outside the scope of the study? Or could some questions be cut, making the survey length more manageable and perhaps ensuring a higher response rate?

Then in April 2007, journalism teachers at three Dallas public high schools distributed the pretested 32-item survey to black and Latino female students during class (with administrative permission). The researcher administered the survey at a Girls Club in South Dallas. Young women were encouraged to participate, but they were not offered

any reward for taking part in the study. Racial/ethnic minorities dominated the female

population at each of these locations. In 2007, African-Americans represented 36 percent

of all female students at School 1 and 95 percent of all female students at School 2, both

of which are located in southern Dallas. Latinas represented 61 percent of all female

students at School 1 and 5 percent at School 2 (Dallas Independent School District, 2008).

All respondents at the Girls Club were black**.**

School 3, located in a more affluent neighborhood in North Dallas, has a multi-

ethnic student body for several reasons.[2] First, although the neighborhood is primarily

zoned for single-family homes and populated by Anglos, many of these families choose to

send their children to private schools. Many of the students who attend School 3 are bused

in from less affluent areas, or live in the neighborhood's apartment complexes. Black

females comprised 28 percent of all female students at School 3 in 2007, while Latinas

represented 53 percent of the female student body. **(**Dallas Independent School District,

2008**).** Altogether, 208 questionnaires were completed. Demographic data gathered

included respondents' race/ethnicity, age, grade level, height, and weight. Overall, 102

respondents self-identified as Latina, and 106 identified as African-American. They

ranged in age from 13 to 18, with a median age of 16.

Procedures

In addition to demographics, survey items were designed to measure variables

associated with the study's three research questions. These variables included Acceptance

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[2] The information regarding School 3 was gleaned through several sources. However, the primary source was a teacher at the school whom the researcher knows through a colleague. In addition, the researcher knows a number of families who live in the neighborhood surrounding School 3, and she spoken with them about the school and their decision to send their own children to private schools.

of the Thin Ideal, Body Image, and Media Use. Three sets of scaled items were developed to assess the dependent variable Acceptance of the Thin Ideal, all adapted versions of well-established measures associated with this variable. This was deemed appropriate as a means of examining the variable using a variety of appropriate tools/approaches, while still keeping the length of the survey down. Since only portions of each scale were used, and statements/items within each scale often represented subtle differences that the researcher hoped to explore, the individual scales were not combined for measurement purposes. This strategy was repeated throughout the survey.

One of the three Likert-type scales used to measure Acceptance of the Thin Ideal was adapted from the Thinness and Restricting Expectancy Inventory (Simmons Smith, & Hill, 2002). This shortened version of the scale offered the responses "Disagree," "Neutral," and "Agree" to four statements including "You are happiest when you are thin" and "You gain more attention from friends when you are thin." The second scale, adapted from the Socio-Cultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Scale -3 (Heinberg, Thompson, and Stormer, 1995), focused more directly on the link between media and the thin ideal. Respondents could select answers ranging from "Disagree completely" to "Agree completely" to five statements including "Photographs of thin women and girls make me wish that I were thin" and "Females who appear on TV shows and movies look the way I want to look." Finally, four statements from the Perceived Socio-Cultural Pressure Scale (Stice, 2001) -- with answers from "none" to "some" to "a lot" -- measured perceived pressure among respondents to meet the dictates of the thin ideal. For example, one statement read, "I've noticed a strong message from the media to be thin or lose weight," while another read, "I've felt pressure from my family to be thin or lose weight."

Another set of survey items addressed subjects' attitudes toward their body, or the dependent variable Body Image, defined as the degree of concern girls had about their weight and figure (Bardone-Cone & Boyd, 2007). One Likert-scale – an adapted version of the Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with Body Part Scale (Berscheid, Walster, & Bohrnstedt, 1973) – included nine measures that gauged participants' level of satisfaction with their "weight," "figure," and other body parts. These items were not combined in a scale for measurement purposes as the literature suggests that different parts of the body hold special significance in terms of beauty within different ethnic groups, differences the researcher hoped to address. The questionnaire also incorporated items developed by Gentles and Harrison (2006) that assessed respondents' body image, as well as feelings of peer pressure about meeting physical ideals. Using an open-ended format, subjects were first asked to supply five words to describe their bodies, then five words to describe the body they believe their female peers think they should have (many respondents did not supply all five words for either query). The latter query was deemed relevant as researchers identify peers -- in addition to media -- as a significant socio-cultural influence on young women's body image (Clark & Tiggemann, 2007).

It was felt that establishing the Body Mass Index of the study respondents would help provide additional context and meaning for the first two research questions. Body Mass Index, or BMI, is considered the best indicator of where one falls on the continuum from underweight to obesity (Centers for Disease Control, 2008). With that in mind, open-ended survey items asked for each respondent's height and weight. Relying on young women to self-report such information runs the risk that they will not be forthright with their answers, or refuse to answer at all (and some did). However, the researcher hoped

the confidential nature of the survey, which was stressed at the time the questionnaires were administered, would help alleviate this potential problem. From respondents' height and weight, the researcher was able to calculate individual BMI scores. In addition, respondents were asked, in open-ended questions, to list what they believed to be the average model's height and weight, as well as the average woman's height and weight. It was felt that this would provide relevant data for purposes of comparison.

Survey items measuring Media Use focused on a specific type of medium: magazines. This strategy was followed for several reasons. First, critics have long identified fashion and beauty magazines, in particular, as leading purveyors of the thin ideal (Currie, 1999; Wolf, 1991). Secondly, both minority groups relevant to this study – Latinos and African-Americans – have access to a broad range of magazines developed specifically for their racial/ethnic group. Thus, by determining usage patterns vis-à-vis this medium, one could gauge respondents' level of exposure to magazines that heavily promote the mainstream Anglo notion of the thin beauty ideal as well as to ethnic content associated with a respondent's culture of origin and its norms and values, including beauty norms. Open-ended questions were used to gather media-use information. Respondents were asked to list any magazines they subscribed to, as well as any other magazines they had read last month.   Finally, they were asked how many hours they spent reading magazines each month.

Analysis

A statistical analysis was conducted on the data, including a series of cross-tabulations to isolate significant relationships between the independent variable Ethnicity

and dependent variables associated with Acceptance of the Thin Ideal, Body Image, and

Media Use. Cross-tabulations were also used to examine relationships among the

dependent variables. Finally, a single binomial-logistic regression was run to determine

which variables had a significant influence on the dependent variables; this regression was

a stepwise elimination using *p*=0.05 as the criterion for entering a variable into the model,

and *p*=0.10 as the criterion for exiting a variable from the model. The independent

variable Ethnicity remained in the final model.

Results
Acceptance of the Thin Ideal

The study's first research question addresses whether/how ethnicity is associated

with young minority females' acceptance of the thin ideal, as presented in the mainstream

media. As noted above, several survey questions probed participants' attitudes toward the

thin ideal. As shown in Table 1, a cross-tabulation found that Ethnicity influenced

Acceptance of the Thin Ideal, as measured in a scale addressing respondents' level of

identification with mediated beauty ideals. African-Americans and Latinas answered

these survey items differently, and the differences were significant (*p<.05*). Overall, black

respondents did not idealize images of thin women displayed in magazines and on TV as

much as their Latina counterparts. For example, 38 percent of Latinas said they would

like to look like a model, versus 16 percent of African-Americans. Likewise, 34 percent

of Latinas wished they looked like women in TV shows and movies, compared with 19

percent of blacks. Responses to one item did not follow this trend: Black women

compared their appearance to female models in magazines more often than Latinas (27

percent versus 19 percent). However, data presented later in this article suggest young

black women may not be comparing themselves exclusively, if at all, to the slim white

models in mainstream fashion and beauty magazines (see Tables 6 & 7).

Table 1 -- Cross-tabulation: Ethnicity & Acceptance of the Thin Ideal

Statement	Ethnicity	Disagree Completely	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Agree Completely	Total
1) I want to look like thin girls in music videos	Latina	21%	20%	29%	23%	7%	100%
	Black	48%	21%	23%	5%	3%	100%
2) I want to look like girls on TV	Latina	9%	25%	32%	27%	7%	100%
	Black	32%	27%	22%	17%	2%	100%
3) I want to look like thin girls in photos	Latina	22%	27%	25%	18%	8%	100%
	Black	54%	24%	13%	7%	2%	100%
4) I compare myself to magazine models	Latina	24%	37%	20%	14%	5%	100%
	Black	37%	18%	18%	21%	6%	100%
5) I want to look like a model	Latina	12%	31%	19%	23%	15%	100%
	Black	44%	22%	18%	9%	7%	100%

*p<.05; Latino N=102; Black N=106

Body-Image

The association between Ethnicity and young minority females' attitudes toward

their bodies, or Body Image, also proved to be significant. First, a cross-tabulation

showed that Ethnicity influenced a young woman's level of satisfaction (using the

abbreviated Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with Body Parts Scale) with both her figure

and weight, but not with other body parts. As Table 2 shows, African-American

respondents were statistically more satisfied with both their figure and weight than their

Latina counterparts (*p*<.01).   Responses clustered in three categories – "Completely

Dissatisfied," "Neither," and "Satisfied." No young women in our survey population

claimed to be completely satisfied with their Body Image, and they were more likely to be

completely dissatisfied with their Body Image than simply dissatisfied. Yet Ethnicity

played a significant role in where a young woman fell on this scale. For instance, Latinas

were more likely to be completely dissatisfied with their weight (34 percent) and figure

(22 percent) than black respondents (22.5 percent and 10 percent, respectively). As a

counterpoint, blacks were satisfied with their weight (55 percent) and figure (72 percent)

more often than Latinas (32 percent and 41 percent, respectively).   In summary, African-

Americans expressed a higher level of comfort with their body image. More than half of

these respondents were comfortable with their weight, and nearly three-quarters were

satisfied with their figure.

Table 2 -- Cross-tabulation: Ethnicity & Satisfaction with Weight & Figure

Trait	Ethnicity	Completely Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Completely Satisfied	Total
With Weight	Latina	34%	0%	34%	32%	0%	100%
	Black	22.5%	0%	22.5%	55%	0%	100%
With Figure	Latina	22%	0%	37%	41%	0%	100%
	Black	10%	0%	18%	72%	0%	100%

*_p_<.01; Latina N=102; Black N=106

Frequencies in Table 3 further support the conclusion that the black females in our

survey population had a better body image than the Latinas. When asked for up to five

words describing their bodies for the survey item "body I have" (many respondents did

not supply five), more black females than Latinas listed positive terms such as

"beautiful," "shapely," or "thick," which respondents defined as "not too slim, not too heavy, just right." In fact, twice as many blacks as Latinas referred to themselves as "beautiful." Latinas more often described themselves using terms or phrases that could be categorized as neutral: "short" or "average weight," for example. The one trait that members of both groups used most to describe themselves, however, was "slim" -- half of black respondents and 40 percent of Latinas. The frequent use of this term by both ethnic groups suggests a common emphasis, or agreement, on the characteristic's value.

Similarly, frequencies for the survey item "body I should have," where girls were asked to list up to five physical characteristics they believe their peers expect them to have, showed that more than a quarter of blacks (26 percent) and more than a third of Latinas (34 percent) included "slim." At the same time, the majority of respondents -- 76 percent of African-Americans and 77 percent of Latinas -- said they did not feel pressure from friends to be thin or lose weight. This seeming discrepancy, especially among Latinas, may represent a unique application of the "third-person effect," in which individuals underestimate the influence of media – and the mediated thin ideal -- on themselves and those close to them, while overestimating its effects on others (Milkie, 1999).

Cross-tabulations were also completed with the independent variable Ethnicity and the "body you have" and "body you should have" survey items, both associated with Body Image. These cross-tabulations, shown in Table 4, were found to highlight the finding that young black females seem to have a stronger body image than young Latinas. For example, in the cross-tabulation between "body I have" and Ethnicity, significantly more

African-American respondents referred to themselves as beautiful ($p<.05$). Blacks were also significantly more likely than Latinas to use the term "thick" to describe themselves (p<.05). Likewise, a cross-tabulation between Ethnicity and the "body I should have" survey item found blacks were significantly more likely than Latinas to say their peers expected them to be "thick" ($p<.05$).

Table 3 -- Body-I-Have: Most Frequent Answers for Blacks & Latinas

Trait	Black (N=106)	Latina (N=102)
Slim	51%	40%
Beautiful	47%	20%
Shapely	42%	27%
Thick*	33%	17%
Average weight	25%	34%
Short	19%	28%
Tall	19%	20%
Chunky, big	15%	18%

*"Thick" ="not too slim, not too heavy, just right."

Table 4 -- Cross-tabulation: Ethnicity & Body I Have/Should Have

Statement	Ethnicity	No	Yes	Total
1) The body I have is beautiful, pretty, good-looking	Latina	86%	14%	100%
	Black	56%	44%	100%
2) The body I have is "thick" (not too slim, not too heavy; just right)	Latina	82%	18%	100%
	Black	68%	32%	100%
3) I should have a "thick" body	Latina	95%	5%	100%
	Black	80%	20%	100%

p<.05; Latina N=102; Black N=103

Body Mass Index

Determining participants' Body Mass Index, or BMI, was considered significant for this study because this number provides a substantive, numeric base from which to analyze young women's perceptions of body image and related issues. In general, a BMI of 18 or below is considered underweight. A BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 is considered healthy. Anything above 25 and below 30 may be overweight, while a BMI of 30 or above is considered obese (Centers for Disease Control, 2008). These categories were used to classify survey participants. As Table 5 shows, African-American respondents were more likely than Latinas to be classified as obese, while Latinas were more often fell into the underweight category. A t-test likewise found a statistically significant difference between the weight of the two groups, with Latinas weighing significantly less than black respondents (t (186) = -3.64, *p*<.01). In addition, when asked to estimate the weight of the average woman, Latina respondents assumed a lower weight than black respondents did. A t-test revealed that the difference between the means was significant (t (188) = -2.28, *p*<.05).

Table 5 --
BMI-Based Categories for Black and Latina Survey
Participants

	Latina (N=92)	Black (N=96)
• Underweight	11%	2%
• Healthy	60%	55%

- <u>Overweight</u>   25%   25%

- <u>Obese</u>   4%   18%

                                                         100%   100%

Magazine Use

Scholars from a range of disciplines agree that the thin ideal pervades mainstream media, particularly the popular fashion and beauty magazines (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002; Guillen & Barr,1994; Monro & Huon, 2005; Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996). The research described here focused on magazines because they are significant purveyors of the thin ideal. In addition, many magazines for young ethnic women – both blacks and Latinas – are widely available today. Respondents' broad reading interests ranged from *Bridal* magazine to *Cottage Living* to *Vibe Vixen*. However, certain titles clearly dominated (these were the only magazines included in the analysis). For instance, fashion and beauty magazines, especially those aimed at teens, were by far the most popular. Among these books, *Seventeen* was the most widely read, with 28 percent of survey respondents saying they subscribed or read it monthly. About 10 percent subscribed to *CosmoGirl* or read it monthly, and 9 percent either subscribed to *Teen Vogue* or read it on a monthly basis.

A second major category of popular magazines included titles aimed at an ethnic audience: blacks. Some 10 percent of the sample either subscribed to *Ebony*, a general-interest magazine developed for a black audience, or read it monthly. Other popular titles in this category included *Essence*, the highest circulation beauty and fashion magazine for

black women; *Jet*, a tabloid-sized general-interest magazine for blacks; and *Vibe*, a music magazine that focuses on hip-hop and rap. Notably, no Latino-oriented publications appeared in the list of frequently read magazines. Celebrity gossip magazines represented a third identifiable category of titles with a following among respondents. The most popular of these was *People*, which 5 percent of respondents subscribed to or read monthly.

Black and Latina respondents' magazine reading habits differed substantially. For instance, when the most common titles were grouped into four categories – fashion and beauty, celebrity gossip, ethnic, and "other" – frequencies showed that 76 percent of Latinas read a fashion/beauty magazine regularly, versus 41 percent of blacks (see Table 6). Approximately half of African-Americans, 49 percent, read an ethnic magazine published for the black community. In contrast, Latinas did not read ethnic magazines developed for Latinos, despite the abundant titles available today, both in English and Spanish. Cross-tabulations with Ethnicity and the most popular magazine titles indicated that the differences in respondents' magazine reading patterns were statistically significant ($p<.05$). For instance, as Table 7 shows, Latinas were significantly more likely to read fashion and beauty books – specifically *CosmoGirl* and *Seventeen* -- while blacks were significantly more likely to read ethnic-oriented magazines – specifically *Ebony*, *Essence,* and *Jet*. The young black females in our sample read the fashion and beauty titles as well, but not as frequently as their Latina counterparts – and they balanced this high "thin ideal" content with exposure to ethnic content.

Table 6 -- Magazines Read Most
by Black & Latina Survey Participants

	Black (N=106)	Latina (N=103)
Fashion & beauty	41%	76%
Ethnic	49%	0%
Celebrity gossip	10%	8%
Other	39%	30%

Table 7 -- Cross-tabulation: Ethnicity &
Magazines Subscribed to/Read Monthly

Magazine	Ethnicity	No	Yes	Total
CosmoGirl	Latina	84%	16%	100%
	Black	95%	5%	100%
Seventeen	Latina	65%	35%	100%
	Black	80%	20%	100%
Ebony	Latina	100%	0%	100%
	Black	81%	19%	100%
Essence	Latina	100%	0%	100%
	Black	91%	9%	100%
Jet	Latina	100%	0%	100%
	Black	86%	14%	100%

*p<.05; Black N=103; Latina N=102

Discussion & Conclusions

Research has linked thin-ideal imagery in popular media outlets to everything from negative body image and low self-esteem to eating disorders (Groez, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). Traditionally these disorders have been considered the province of middle- and upper-class white women. However, recent studies indicate that racial or ethnic status may no longer confer a protective benefit for eating pathology, in part because the

dominant white society's cultural values, as conveyed through mainstream media, reach all ethnic groups (Shaw et al., 2004). This study sought to test this theory by surveying young black and Latina women about their acceptance of the mediated thin ideal, their body image, and their media use habits. The survey sought to answer/examine three specific research questions:

1) How is race/ethnicity associated with young minority females' acceptance of the thin ideal, as presented in the mainstream media?

2) How is race/ethnicity associated with young minority females' attitudes toward their bodies, or their body image?

3) How is race/ethnicity associated with young minority females' media use?

One conclusion that this study seems to support is that young Latinas are more attuned to thin-ideal imagery than young black females. They appear to want to resemble the idealized images that saturate mainstream media. For instance, the Latina participants in this study were significantly more likely than African American females to say they wanted to look like a female model, wanted to look like women on TV and in the movies, wanted to look like thin women in music videos, and wished they could look like thin women in photos. In summary, these Latinas clearly identified a slim figure – as well as other characteristics associated with traditional Anglo beauty norms widely disseminated via mass media -- as salient beauty traits.

Evidence from this research also indicates that overall, African-American respondents appeared to have more positive body images than Latinas. For instance, as shown in Table 3, black survey participants used more positive terms to describe their

bodies than Latina respondents did. Latinas, in contrast, chose more neutral terms. Black survey participants were nearly twice as likely as Latina respondents to describe themselves as beautiful, a difference between the two groups that cross-tabulations identified as significant. African-Americans were also significantly happier with their weight and, especially, their figure than Latinas.

At times, black respondents' positive body image appeared to resist contradictory evidence. For instance, 50 percent of blacks described themselves as "slim" versus 40 percent of Latinas. At the same time, black respondents' higher BMI scores more often pushed them into the "overweight" and "obese" range, according to national standards, and a *t*-test found that Latinas weighed significantly less than black respondents. In addition, Ethnicity did not significantly affect whether a respondent described herself as slim. These findings suggest that the term "slim" may hold different meanings for these two ethnic groups. Latina participants perhaps subscribe to a version more in keeping with the mainstream Anglo interpretation. They may have internalized the mediated notion of the thin ideal while their black counterparts have not, or at least not to the same extent. Internalization of the thin ideal has been associated with negative self-perception (Stice & Shaw, 1994), which may explain Latina participants' more negative feelings toward their bodies.

Not all the survey participants may have internalized the thin ideal, but many of them seem to recognize its existence. When respondents were asked about the kind of body their peers thought they "should have," the trait that was cited most often by Latinas and, to a lesser extent, blacks, was "slim." A third of Latinas and a quarter of black respondents said their peers expected them to be slim (or another term that meant the same

thing, such as "thin" or "slender"). Yet, these young women said they did not feel pressure from their friends or even boys to be slim. This suggests a "third-person" effect at work. If a young woman understands, perhaps subconsciously, that her peer group supports the thin-ideal standard, she may expect them to hold other females to that standard. She may not, however, expect the same level of scrutiny from her close friends. Just as a young woman believes the media do not influence her, she may not expect close friends to be influenced by the mainstream media's strictures either.

This study suggests that young Latinas may have internalized the mediated thin ideal more than young black females, and that young black females have a stronger body image than young Latinas. Through attribute agenda setting, media confer salience upon certain "beauty traits." In addition, viewing idealized, slender females in magazines and other media has been associated with negative affect and lower self-esteem (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002). So the media – in this case magazines -- respondents consumed was important. Fashion and beauty magazines have long portrayed images that critics say subordinate women and glamorize the thin ideal (Bordo, 2003; Kilbourne, 2003; Lindner, 2004; Milkie, 1999; Wolf, 1991). These media also say something about the color of beauty: Most models working today are white. According to a 2008 survey, 6 percent of the models who took part in New York's Fashion Week that year were black, 6 percent were Asian, 1 percent were Latina, and 87 were percent white (St. Philip, 2010). In summary, most of the females whom mainstream media hold up as exemplars of beauty share two defining characteristics: thin-ideal figures and white skin.

These mainstream fashion and beauty magazines were the reading material of choice among Latina respondents. Three-quarters of Latinas subscribed to or read a

mainstream fashion/beauty magazine every month, compared with four in 10 African-Americans. Although African-Americans also read the fashion and beauty books, they also read ethnic magazines published for the black community. Half of black participants subscribed to or read *Ebony*, *Essence,* and/or *Jet* each month. The author of a 1995 *Newsweek* essay suggests that the content of the beauty/fashion/women's magazines intended for a mainstream audience differs greatly from that of such ethnic-oriented women's magazines as *Essence* (Ingrassia, 1995). These ethnic magazines reflect the norms and values of African-American culture:

> In the black community, size isn't debated, it's taken for granted – a sign, some say, that after decades of preaching black-is-beautiful, black parents and educators have finally gotten across the message of self-respect. Indeed, black teens grow up equating a full figure with health and fertility. Black women's magazines tend to tout NOT TRYING TO BE SIZE 8, not TEN TIPS FOR THIN THIGHS (p. 66).

Landrine and Klonoff (1996) write that all ethnic minority groups function within the dominant culture by creating their own parallel, and often duplicate, institutions. In addition to schools, churches, and social clubs, these institutions include ethnic media -- newspapers, magazines, radio, Websites/blogs, movies, and television:

> These duplicate institutions reflect and maintain each minority culture and are essential to the perpetuation of the ethnic group's culture and identity. The existence of such duplicate institutions for African-Americans is obvious and undeniable, and it is evidence for the existence of an African-American culture (p. 47).

Many of the African-American women in this study gravitated toward ethnic or black-oriented media, which help maintain their ties to their culture of origin. The fact that they turn to these magazines suggests they may utilize other "parallel institutions" as well – attend a black church and/or, as we know is true of many black females in this

sample, attend a majority black school. These institutional connections, in turn, keep these young women attuned to the values and norms, including beauty norms, of their culture of origin. They may be aware of the dominant Anglo society's beauty standards, including the thin ideal. However, because the thin ideal is not valued within African-American culture, their continued immersion in African-American society, through ethnic media and other means, continues to confer some protection from the pathologies that accompany thin-ideal identification. A later study examining this complex topic might include additional measures, beyond ethnic media, of how blacks and other ethnic minorities remain connected to their cultures of origin.

As noted earlier in this paper, what little research that has been done on the link between acculturation and body image/eating pathology among black women found the highest rate of disordered eating symptoms among bicultural black women. Bicultural individuals can be identified as those who identify with both their culture of origin and mainstream Anglo culture and have learned how to function within both. The African-American high school students in this study showed evidence that they were aware of mainstream Anglo beauty ideals. Yet the influence of their culture of origin appeared to be stronger. One reason for this may be the fact that many of them lived in, if not homogenous neighborhoods, than in neighborhoods with high concentrations of blacks. Most of the participants attended schools with a large African-American constituency as well. So perhaps the prediction by Shaw, et al., (2004) that with the profusion of mass media espousing the thin ideal, minority women no longer will be protected by their ethnicity from eating pathology or related self-esteem issues underestimates the power of other cultural influences.

The black community, as Landrine & Klonoff (1996) note, has spent decades developing the "parallel structures" – from churches to social clubs – that sustain its culture. Moving beyond "traditional" to "bicultural" on the acculturation scale for black women thus may require physically moving beyond the reach of many of these institutions – away from the African-American neighborhoods, schools, and churches in which most of our black survey participants grew up. This study suggests that African-American culture may prescribe beauty norms of its own: The number of black girls who described themselves as "thick" and who said their peers expected them to look this way was statistically significant. Obesity has also been a concern among more traditional black women, a concern this survey supported. This clearly is an issue that should be (and has been) addressed by public health experts, and understanding the role of acculturation and body image among African-American women may be a place to start. Yet, as suggested above, black women who leave African-American neighborhoods and their embedded institutions, those who are bicultural or even acculturated, may indeed be more susceptible to the dominant Anglo society's thin ideal-related pathologies -- perhaps as susceptible as their Anglo counterparts. More research should be done to explore these questions.

Latino females, in contrast, may not find the same strong system of parallel structures in place in their newer immigrant communities. Many light-skinned Latinas may also find acculturation easier without the legacy of strong racial prejudice and the color divide that African-Americans have long faced. In contrast, the majority of Latinas in the study seem to be moving in the direction of acculturation. They seem to have embraced the beauty norms of the dominant Anglo society, including the thin ideal, and to be striving to meet those standards. This interpretation of the data was supported by the

fact that very few, if any, of the Latina respondents read an ethnic magazine published for a Hispanic audience – despite the growing number of available titles. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that many Latinas are white. Their lighter skin tone may encourage them to relate to the Anglo models and actresses they see populating mainstream magazines – and to strive for the body image and other physical traits these women represent as the pinnacle of American-style beauty.

As light-skinned young women, Latinas have a better chance than their African-American counterparts of blending seamlessly into mainstream American life, and they may view popular fashion and beauty books as "how-to" manuals on acculturating into teen life in the U.S. In addition, whereas African-Americans have had a century or more to develop alternate institutions to support a cohesive ethnic minority culture, most young Latinas are the children of recent immigrants – a group that has not had the same opportunity to build up a series of respected ethnic media and social institutions to provide cultural cohesion.

Finally, unlike the U.S. black population, the American Latino population comes from dozens of different countries, and thus dozens of Latino subcultures. While most of the young women we surveyed were of Mexican descent, that may have had more to do with the survey location -- Dallas, Texas -- than anything. A survey of young Latinas on the East Coast, for instance, might have included a sample of young women from a far wider range of countries and subcultures. Thus, acculturation to mainstream society and its norms may be a more viable alternative for Latina participants in this survey, and they may have fewer linkages, beyond family ties, to their culture(s) of origin.

In conclusion, these study results suggest the notion that minority females are protected by their ethnicity from bulimia and anorexia nervosa, disorders usually associated with Anglo females, should no longer be taken at face value.   The proliferation of mass media promoting the thin ideal is one relevant factor to be considered. However, a young minority woman's level of acculturation to the dominant society must also be taken into account. More studies should apply the theory of acculturation to bring better clarity to questions surrounding this very significant public health issue.

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