

Differences Between Caucasians and Asians in Levels of Body Satisfaction

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PS325 May 3rd

Abstract

Body image has been commonly discussed in various cultures. Body dissatisfaction is related to health issues such as eating disorders and substance abuse. Emerging research suggests that Caucasians have more body image disturbance than the other ethnic groups. Furthermore, body image issues specifically in Asian population have been relatively unexamined. The purpose of this study was to examine the differences between Caucasians and Asians in levels of body satisfaction. The hypotheses of our study were: (a) Asians would have a higher appearance satisfaction rating than Caucasians; (b) Asians would have a higher body area satisfaction rating than Caucasians; and (c) Caucasians would have a greater body dissatisfaction than Asians. Self-identified Caucasian ($n=76$) and Asian ($n=55$) college students aged 18-24 in an online survey posted on Facebook. Participants were asked to answer questions identifying ethnicities and assessing body satisfaction. Results of this study showed that Caucasians reported significantly higher level of body area satisfaction than Asians, while there were no significant differences between Caucasians and Asians in their levels of appearance evaluation and body dissatisfaction. Limitations regarding accuracy of ethnicity identification and inclusiveness of more complete and various samples are discussed.

Key Words: Body image, ethnicity, body satisfaction, Caucasians, Asians

Differences Between Caucasians and Asians in Levels of Body Satisfaction

Body image is commonly defined as one's perception about one's own appearance and body image related issues have been commonly discussed in all cultures ("What Is Body Image?", n.d.). A positive body image is related to higher self-esteem and confidence, while negative body image is highly correlated with physical and mental health issues, such as eating disorders or substance abuse (Weltzin & Fitzpatrick, 2014; Naeimi et al., 2016). Therefore it is important to assess factors that may contribute to positive body image. Previous researchers in this area have investigated the relationship between body image and factors such as age and gender (Lipowska et al., 2016; Sabik & Cole, 2017; Tiggemann & Fitzpatrick, 2014). In addition, results of recent studies revealed relations between cultural factors (e.g. media, peers and family) and college students' perceptions of body image (Breny & Madden, 2015). Recent studies have also reported the significant differences in body satisfaction among different ethnicities, showing the importance of including ethnicity studies on body satisfaction (Dye, 2016; Kronenfeld et al., 2010).

In western culture, college-aged populations, especially women, tend to have a strong preference for thinness and experience body dissatisfaction due to their exposure to ideal body images in the media (Madden & Breny, 2016). Previous research studying the relationship between ethnicity and body image found that Caucasians reported more body image disturbance and body dissatisfaction compared to other ethnic groups (Altabe, 1998; Dye, 2016; Kronenfeld et al., 2010). The reason for Caucasians reporting more body dissatisfaction than the other ethnic groups could be that the messages conveyed on social media about what is ideal body image significantly influence women's perception of their own body in western culture (Madden & Breny, 2016). After seeing the models and internet stars posting their "perfect" body on social media, women would feel more dissatisfied with their own body shape, and this phenomenon is very popular in western culture, causing more

Caucasian women to have more body dissatisfaction than the other ethnic groups (Madden & Breny, 2016).

While a large number of studies focus on body image in Caucasians, Asian populations remain relatively unexamined (Kronenfeld et al., 2010, Madden & Breny, 2016). A previous study evaluating the differences between Western nations such as United States and China and other Asian countries in their body image disturbances found that the impact of Western media influences was stronger than that of Chinese/Asian media influences (Jackson & Chen, 2016). Results showed that Chinese/Asian women showed more facial disturbance, while Western women showed more body image related disturbance (Jackson & Chen, 2016).

The goal of this study is to further understand the relationship between body image and ethnicity in Caucasian and Asian college students. In the present study, we only focus on appearance evaluation scale and body area satisfaction scale to find out the population's general evaluation of their own body image and satisfaction towards specific body areas. We also use the Stunkard Scale to find out participants' body dissatisfaction. The hypotheses of our study were: (a) Asians would have a higher appearance satisfaction rating than Caucasians; (b) Asians would have a higher body area satisfaction rating than Caucasians; and (c) Caucasians would have a greater body dissatisfaction than Asians.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 111 females and 20 males ($N=131$) ranging in age from 18 to 24. The majority of participants were Caucasian (76, 41.3%), while 39 (21.2%) were East Asian, 22 (12%) were Middle Eastern/North African, 19 (10.3%) were Hispanic/Latino, 10 (5.4%) were South Asian, 6 (3.3%) were Southeast Asian, 5 (2.7%) were Black and 7

(3.8%) were others. Since the samples for East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern/North African, Hispanic/Latino, Black and others are too small ($N < 30$), we combined the East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian into Asian category, and only analysis the Caucasian (76) and Asian (55) samples.

Measures

Body Image Satisfaction-Appearance Evaluation. The Multidimensional Body-Self Relation Questionnaire- Appearance Scale (MBSRQ-AS; Cash, 2000) is a 34-item measure designed to assess participants' perception of their actual and ideal body type. An example of an item from this instrument is "I constantly worry about being or becoming fat." (Cash, 2000). The appearance evaluation scale from the MBSRQ-AS was used to measure appearance evaluation. Participants responded to the appearance evaluation scale by selecting a number from 1 to 5 indicating definitely disagree to definitely agree. Internal reliability in the present sample was adequate ($\alpha = .89$).

Body Image Satisfaction-Body Areas Satisfaction. The body areas satisfaction scale in MBSRQ-AS was used to measure satisfaction to specific body areas. Participants responded to the body areas satisfaction scale by selecting a number from 1 to 5 indicating very dissatisfied to very satisfied. Internal reliability in the present sample was adequate ($\alpha = .81$).

Body Dissatisfaction The Stunkard Scale (Fallon & Rozin, 1985) is a pictorial measure created to compare current and ideal body shapes. Participants viewed a picture of 9 figures and respond by selecting a number from 1 to 9 that most resembled their current body shape. After that, they viewed the same picture and selected a number from 1 to 9 that most resembled their ideal body shape. Each of the nine figures had an ascending numeric value, with number 1 indicating the slimmest body image and number 9 indicating the heaviest

image. Scores for participants' body dissatisfaction are computed by subtracting the two values they chose for current body shape and ideal body shape. Larger scores indicate more willingness to change current body shape and lower scores indicate less willingness to change current body shape.

Design & Procedure

The study design was correlational. Participants were asked to take part in an online survey about body image. We shared a survey link on Facebook and the participants participate in this survey through the link. The informed consent clearly stated that the participations were completely voluntary and the responses will be kept confidential and treated anonymously. After participants finished the survey, they were told in the debrief page that the responses will be used in our study examining the relationship between ethnicity and body image. We follow APA ethical guidelines throughout the study process.

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for major study variables. Three independent sample t-tests were run to determine whether there were ethnicity differences between Caucasians and Asians on appearance evaluation, body area satisfaction and body dissatisfaction. Caucasians ($M = 3.06$ $SD = 0.65$) reported significantly higher level of body area satisfaction than Asians ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.67$), $t(129) = 2.13$, $p = 0.04$. Caucasians ($M = 3.02$ $SD = 0.91$) and Asians ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.75$) did not differ significantly on level of appearance evaluation, $t(126.7) = -0.03$, $p = 0.98$. Caucasians ($M = 1.32$ $SD = 0.93$) and Asians ($M = 1.27$, $SD = 1.01$) had no significant differences on appearance evaluation, $t(129) = 0.25$, $p = 0.80$. Table 2 provides the data in the three independent sample T-tests for Appearance Evaluation, Body Area Satisfaction and Body Dissatisfaction.

Discussion

This study explored the relationship between ethnicity and body satisfaction in a sample of college students from Caucasian and Asian ethnic groups. We did this study because body image dissatisfaction is related to more serious health issues such as eating disorders and substance abuse (Weltzin & Fitzpatrick, 2014; Naeimi et al., 2016). Participants completed a survey measuring level of body satisfaction. The results of this study showed that Caucasians reported a higher level of body areas satisfaction than Asians. However, there were no significant differences between Asians and Caucasians in their appearance evaluation and body dissatisfaction.

The result of Body Area Satisfaction sub scale showed that Caucasians reported a higher level of body areas satisfaction than Asians. Body area satisfaction in Asian population was unexamined in all the previous studies. This finding is partially inconsistent with the previous study, which showed that White and Latina women reported significantly more body area satisfaction than black women (Warren, 2012). However, Asians were not included in his study, so no relationship was suggested between his result and the result of our study (Warren, 2012). A possible explanation for the result of our study can be that we only used Body Area Satisfaction sub scale in MBSRQ-AS, while previous studies which found significantly higher level of body dissatisfaction in Caucasians compared to other ethnic groups used multiple measurements to assess level of body satisfaction (Cash, 2000; Warren, 2012; Madden & Breny, 2016; Altabe, 1998; Dye, 2016; Kronenfeld et al., 2010).

The result of Appearance Evaluation sub scale showed that there was no significant differences between Caucasians and Asians in their appearance evaluation. This finding is inconsistent with the previous study which showed that Asians have lower appearance evaluation for their own body shape compared to Caucasians (Rakhkovskaya & Warren,

2016). Although this previous study also recruited only college-aged students, the way they identify ethnicity is different from us. In our survey, we categorized participants' ethnicity by asking them the question "which ethnic group do you most identify with?". On the other hand, Rakhkovskaya and Warren (2016) included questions in their study assessing the participants' extents of ethnic identity. For example, they included generational status response items asking which generation the participants were if they originated from other countries (Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2016). The difference in ways of identifying ethnicities might contribute to the inconsistency of the two studies.

The result of Body Dissatisfaction is inconsistent with the previous research which also used Standard scale to measure level of body dissatisfaction across ethnicity (Kronenfeld et al., 2010). Kronenfeld et al. (2010) found that Asians reported significantly lower body dissatisfaction than Caucasians. Although their study used same measurement for body dissatisfaction with us, they surveyed 4023 women aged 25-45, while we surveyed 131 women aged 18-24. Despite the impact of sample size, age range could be a reason explaining the inconsistency of the studies.

The limitations of this study must be considered. First, the main challenge of this study is the way we assess participants' ethnicities. We measure ethnicity by asking the question "which ethnic group do you most identify with?". However, this question is confusing for those participants whose ethnicity identity is indistinct. For example, some participants' parents are both Chinese, but they were born and raised up in America. For those participants originated from other places, it is hard to identify which ethnic group they belong to. The vagueness of ethnic category might cause the not significant result of this study. Secondly, participants were volunteers who completed the online survey we posted on Facebook. This approach remains a limitation because people who are not using Facebook were excluded from this study. Facebook is the social media most prevalent in the United

States. However, international students may not use Facebook as frequently as students originated from the United States. For example, the most prevalent social media in Chinese international students is WeChat, so international students from China who do not use Facebook had a high possibility to be excluded from this study. Therefore, our study has the potential to miss data from those who have the most extent of Asian identity.

Future researchers can figure out ways how to differentiate more clearly in the self-report about participants' ethnicities. There is a need for future research to conduct a survey that more accurately assess participants' ethnicity. At the same time, future researchers may figure out a more inclusive and efficient way to include population from various ethnic groups.

To conclude, our study aimed to figure out if there are significant differences between Caucasians and Asians in their levels of body satisfaction, because body satisfaction is highly related to health problems. Specifically, the results showed that Caucasians reported significantly higher body area satisfaction than Asians, while there are no significant differences been found between Caucasians and Asians in their levels of appearance evaluation and body dissatisfaction.

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Tables

Table 1

Minimums, Maximums, Means and Standard Deviations for All Study Variables (N = 131)

		<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Measure					
1. Appearance Evaluation.	Caucasians	1.00	4.71	3.02	0.91
	Asians	1.00	4.71	3.02	0.75
2. Body Area Satisfaction.	Caucasians	1.00	4.44	3.06	0.65
	Asians	1.22	4.44	2.82	0.67
3. Body Dissatisfaction.	Caucasians	0.00	5.00	1.32	0.93
	Asians	0.00	5.00	1.27	1.01

Table 2

Appearance Evaluation, Body Area Satisfaction and Body Dissatisfaction means for Caucasians and Asians

	Ethnicity		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	Caucasians	Asians		
Appearance Evaluation.	3.02 (0.91)	3.02 (0.75)	0.03	126.67
Body Area Satisfaction.	3.06 (0.65)	2.82 (0.67)	2.13	129
Body Dissatisfaction	1.32	1.27	0.25	129

Note. Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

Appendix

Which ethnic group do you most identify with?

- White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Black
- Native American
- South Asian (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka etc.)
- Southeast Asian (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam etc.)
- East Asian (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Taiwan etc.)
- Middle Eastern/North African
- Others

The Multidimensional Body-Self Relation Questionnaire:

APPEARANCE EVALUATION: 3 5 9 12 15 18* 19*

Choose 1 if you definitely disagree with the statement; choose 2 if you mostly disagree; choose 3 if you neither agree nor disagree; choose 4 if you mostly agree; and choose 5 if you definitely agree with the statement.

BODY SATISFACTION: CAUCASIANS VERSUS ASIANS

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1. Before going out in public, I always notice how I look.
2. I am careful to buy clothes that will make me look my best.
3. My body is sexually appealing.
4. I constantly worry about being or becoming fat.
5. I like my looks just the way they are.
6. I check my appearance in a mirror whenever I can.
7. Before going out, I usually spend a lot of time getting ready.
8. I am very conscious of even small changes in my weight.
9. Most people would consider me good-looking.
10. It is important that I always look good.
11. I use very few grooming products.
12. I like the way I look without my clothes on.
13. I am self-conscious if my grooming isn't right.
14. I usually wear whatever is handy without caring how it looks.
15. I like the way my clothes fit me.
16. I don't care what people think about my appearance.
17. I take special care with my hair grooming.
18. I dislike my physique.

BODY SATISFACTION: CAUCASIANS VERSUS ASIANS

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19. I am physically unattractive.
20. I never think about my appearance.
21. I am always trying to improve my physical appearance.
22. I am on a weight-loss diet.

BODY AREAS SATISFACTION: 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34

Use this 1 to 5 scale to indicate how dissatisfied or satisfied you are with each of the following areas or aspects of your body (with 1 indicating very dissatisfied, 2 indicating mostly dissatisfied, 3 indicating neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 indicating mostly satisfied and 5 indicating very satisfied):

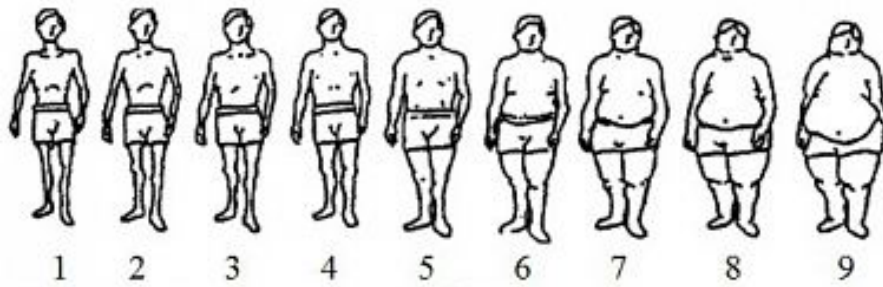
23. Face (facial features, complexion)
24. Hair (color, thickness, texture)
25. Lower torso (buttocks, hips, thighs, legs)
26. Mid torso (waist, stomach)
27. Upper torso (chest or breasts, shoulders, arms)
28. Muscle tone
29. Weight
30. Height
31. Overall appearance

The Stunkard Scale:

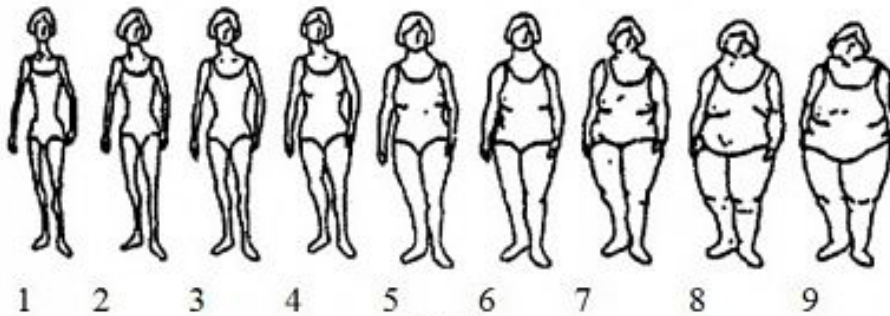
BODY SATISFACTION: CAUCASIANS VERSUS ASIANS

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1. Which figure best represents your body shape and size? (Choose a number from 1 to 9)
2. Which figure best represents your ideal body shape and size? (Choose a number from 1 to 9)



Boy



Girl