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# Brown Beauty: Body Image, Latinas, and the Media

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## Introduction

The purpose of the present research is to use social cognitive theory, social comparison theory, and cultivation theory to explore how media viewing impacts the body image of Latina women, and to examine the role of ethnic identity in the development of body image.

What follows is a review of the literature describing media consumption and body image, including core concepts and constructs pertaining to the perception of body. Epidemiological data for body image and relevant mental health diagnoses are also discussed. The present work focuses on ethnicity as a central contributor to the development of body image and examines key theories that contribute to the scholarly understanding of the development of body image.

Research has fully established that media messages have an effect on female body image (e.g., Bell, Lawton, & Dittmar, 2007; Levine & Harrison, 2009; Tiggemann, Slater, Bury, Hawkins, & Firth, 2013). The media industry portrays the ideal female image in society as typically lighter-skinned and unrealistically proportioned, with an inordinately small waist and large bust. This image is perceived to be linked to happiness, desirability, and status (Tiggemann, 2005a; Tiggemann, 2005b; Tiggemann, Polivy, & Hargreaves, 2009). Previous research supports a relationship between media consumption and reduced self-esteem, increased self-consciousness, body-related anxiety, the development of eating disorders, and body dissatisfaction (Botta, 2000; Brown & Dittmar, 2005; Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Martins & Harrison, 2012).

Scholars once thought that Latin American cultures rejected thin bodies as unattractive (Goodman, 2002; Pompper & Koenig, 2004). Indeed, Latinas have reported greater body satisfaction than Caucasian women (Barry & Grilo, 2002). However, other evidence has indicated that Latina women report body dissatisfaction almost equal to that of Caucasian women (Lopez, Corona, & Halfond, 2013; Viladrich, Yeh, Bruning, & Weiss, 2009). Viladrich et al. (2009) found that Latina women reported a drive for thinness while simultaneously appreciating the curvier body type. These participants were unhappy with their own physical appearances but endorsed acceptance of a culture-wide pattern for a larger, fuller physique.

In addition to being understudied, both male and female Latinos from diverse ethnic subgroup heritages (e.g., Puerto Rican, Dominican American, Mexican American, etc.) tend to be grouped together. Considering Latinos as one homogenous, pan-ethnic group for research is often convenient but does not always lead to generalizable results because of the cultural differences among subgroups (Jurkowski, Kurlanska, &

Ramos, 2010; Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2001). In terms of media effects, research accounting for subgroup differences with dynamic content, such as televised images and social networking sites, is still in its infancy.

## **Literature Review**

### **Body Image**

Tiggemann (2011) asserts that the sociocultural model, which is the predominant worldview explaining body image, outlines the following points:

- (1) There exist societal ideals of beauty (within a particular culture) that are (2) transmitted via a variety of sociocultural channels. These ideals are then (3) internalized by individuals so that (4) satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with appearance will be a function of the extent to which individuals do (or do not) meet the ideal prescription. (p. 13)

The feelings and attitudes one has about his or her own body arise from numerous and varied determinants. These include sociocultural, psychological, and interpersonal factors. Individuals and groups in a society, therefore, have a large role in designating the beauty standard, and society's mass media also play a key role in disseminating standards through extensive messages. Through mass ascription of a beauty norm, members of a culture tend to avow that norm.

The average body mass index (BMI) of female models depicted in the media is 16.3 (where 18.5 is low normal) (Tiggemann, 2011), while the average female BMI is 28.7 (classifying her as overweight) (Flegal, Carroll, Kit, & Ogden, 2012). Given that media content presents females who are very thin, when these images are compounded with other social pressures, it is not surprising that nearly half of females dislike their bodies (Bearman, Presnell, Martinez, & Stice, 2006).

Dissatisfaction stems in large part from awareness (i.e., knowledge of the socially determined idealized thin) and internalization of the often-depicted idealized thin. The idealized thin is transmitted through omnipresent entities embedded in culture and society: media, family members, and peers. Media models and societal pressures are the strongest determinants for the drive for thinness in women (Fernandez & Pritchard, 2012).

A meta-analysis by Grabe, Hyde, and Ward (2008) revealed, "Media aimed at girls, adolescents, and young women are replete with extremely thin models that portray an ideal that is unattainable at most" (p. 460). Fitzsimmons-Craft et al. (2012) found that internalization of the thin ideal

predicted both body surveillance and body dissatisfaction, and body surveillance predicted body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, Grabe et al. (2008) found a relationship between exposure to the thin ideal and a woman's practice of disordered eating and eating disorder development. Levine and Murnen (2009) indicated that as many as 20% of young women, ages 12 to 30, experience a negative body image and disordered eating, which consequently lead to personal suffering.

Researchers who conducted a meta-analysis of experiments found that females reported a significantly poorer body image after viewing ultrathin models on television and print media versus average-size models (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). This association is troubling given that of all mental illnesses, eating disorders claim the most lives (Academy for Eating Disorders, 2014; National Institute of Mental Health, 2014).

It was thought that informing readers about the digital manipulations that a picture undergoes would mitigate body dissatisfaction. Two separate studies tested warning labels and found that body dissatisfaction remained constant across thin-ideal conditions (Ata, Thompson, & Small, 2013; Tiggemann et al., 2013). In women higher on the appearance comparison scale, the labels served as a prime to focus on the model's body (Tiggemann et al., 2013). A warning does not lessen the effects of thin ideals on body dissatisfaction.

Television and print are not the only media that have an effect on body image for women. Results from an analysis of 20 peer-reviewed articles indicate that the use of social networking sites is associated with increased body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). The researchers argue that peers provide more relevant and important comparison targets, and social networking sites are convenient for social comparisons (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Women are bombarded with thin-ideal messages from mass media and computer-mediated communication.

Researchers have contributed extensively to the understanding of female body image, but the focus has been almost exclusively on Caucasian women. Much less work has looked specifically at understanding ethnic minority females, such as Latinas (Schooler & Lowry, 2011).

### **Latinas in the United States**

Latinos are the largest ethnic population group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). In particular, Latina women account for approximately 51% of Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Given these census data, scholars should endeavor to learn more about Latino health

issues because increased knowledge will promote the cultural competence needed to support Latino communities appropriately. To date, most research conducted on body image has focused on majority culture populations and has largely neglected Latinas (Wildes & Emery, 2001). Scholars have just begun to recognize the importance of researching Latina body image.

Recently, studies have started to focus solely on Latina women. In one study using focus groups with Latina college students, discussions of body image issues resulted in four common themes: “(1) cultural disparities in body-ideals, including the influence of the media and acculturation issues; (2) messages about body shape and weight received by family, peers, and society; (3) difficulties in making healthy eating and physical activities choices as a function of college life; and (4) the influence of peers and potential male partners on body satisfaction and body-ideals” (Franko et al., 2012, p. 383). These themes reveal the multitude of influences and messages Latina women receive about their bodies, which in turn influence their self-image.

Research by Menon and Harter (2012) concluded that pressure to acculturate to U.S. body ideals leads to the internalization of the thin ideal, which causes body image disturbance. It was discovered that social support by family and peers was able to protect against body image disturbance (Menon & Harter, 2012). More recently, Schooler and Daniels (2014) observed, “Results indicate that strong ethnic identity may buffer Latina adolescents from the negative effects of viewing sexualized, White media images” (p. 16). It can be gleaned from these findings that the prevention of body image disturbance for Latinas depends on support from family, peers, and ethnic identity. Unfortunately, the process is not that simple or consciously controlled. The greater the number of generations born in the United States, the more likely they are to acculturate to U.S. body ideals perpetuated in the media (Warren, Castillo, & Gleaves, 2009). The longer a family lives in the United States, the more likely it is that its members will be acculturated (the buffering effect of their ethnic culture will be reduced), which means that a Latina woman’s social support will have already internalized U.S. body ideals.

What has been presented here is the proverbial tip of the iceberg in understanding Latina women and body dissatisfaction. Media effects researchers have looked more deeply into the issue while using two popular theories: cultivation theory and social comparison theory. These theories address how media consumption can lead to body disturbance and the effects of comparing oneself to media models.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation theory contends that heavy television exposure subtly changes a viewer's perception of reality, creating difficulty distinguishing reality from media depictions (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Morgan, Shanahan & Signorielli, 2009). Heavy viewers, when compared with light viewers, demonstrate attitudes or beliefs that align with the media's version of reality.

Gerbner and Gross (1976) indicate that 4 hours or more per day is considered heavy viewing. Nielsen (2015) data attest that Hispanics watch television (traditional, not Internet streaming; language unspecified) 121 hours and 11 minutes per month. This averages to 4 hours of traditional television viewing per day for Hispanic households and reaches the threshold for heavy television viewing, according to Gerbner and Gross (1976).

Because the review of research has established Latino television viewers as heavy viewers, cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) can now be applied to body image issues. Most media images of women demonstrate an unattainable standard of thinness (Tiggemann, 2005a; Tiggemann, 2005b; Tiggemann, Polivy, & Hargreaves, 2009). Moreover, Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, and Caruthers (2004) found that cultivation theory explained body dissatisfaction and distorted body image resulting from mainstream media consumption.

When television consistently portrays certain values, people, and themes, these become the social reality for viewers (Tiggemann, 2005a). Mediated images beyond television also perpetuate the thin ideal (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004): Soap opera viewing predicted the internalization of and drive for thinness (Tiggemann, 2005a); the consumption of music videos (Grabe & Hyde, 2009; Tiggeman, 2005a) and dramas (Van den Bulck, 2000) had a negative impact on body image; and viewing network competition reality shows correlated with body dissatisfaction and a drive for thinness (Egbert & Belcher, 2011). Female viewers who view the thin ideal are overall less satisfied with their own bodies and want to lose weight (Van den Bulck, 2000).

In the work of Harrison (2003), participants demonstrated approval for a female physique that was smaller at the waist and hips with medium-size breasts. Levine and Harrison (2009) asserted that thin portrayals are considered to be normative and attractive by women, whereas being overweight or obese is deviant and distasteful. The impact of the media goes beyond the images shown; it also includes those images that are excluded. Omitting depictions of average-size women creates an illusion of reality. If the media portray few to no normal-weight and/or overweight women, consumers assume that only the thin ideal is worthy of attention. These findings point toward a cultivation effect. So far, most body image

studies have focused on women, with samples comprising mostly Caucasian women.

Shrum and Bischak (2001) argued that firsthand experience resonates with individuals and actually facilitates resorting to mental shortcuts (i.e., heuristics), demonstrating cultivation. Television viewing has the potential to make attitudes toward a message stronger. Fujioka (2005) conducted a study investigating mediated news portrayals of Mexican Americans by Mexican American participants and by Caucasian participants. In this study, Mexican Americans identified more strongly in terms of ethnicity (i.e., “ethnic affiliation”) than did Caucasian participants. Mexican Americans had stronger emotional responses to the stories that referenced Mexican Americans than did Caucasians. Likewise, the Mexican Americans were able to retrieve more information from memory regarding the news stories and found the positive stories generally more arousing.

These findings support information processing in accordance with the schema of self and with social identity theory. Fujioka (2005) concluded that self-referencing news (e.g., news about Mexican Americans viewed by Mexican Americans) would trigger feelings of ethnic identity/affiliation.

Testing the longitudinal effects of viewing Black-oriented television and mainstream (Caucasian) television by Latina girls, Schooler (2008) found that girls were most satisfied with their bodies after frequently viewing Black-oriented programs. The results were the complete opposite for mainstream television; Latina girls were more dissatisfied with their bodies after frequent viewing (Schooler, 2008). Interestingly, the girls who tended to focus on mainstream television were found to be more acculturated. It was suggested that more research should focus on whether acculturation causes more mainstream viewing or if mainstream viewing leads to acculturation. Schooler (2008) carefully pointed out that the sample used was heavily Dominican and Puerto Rican, thus not representing all Latino cultures.

Staunch cultivation theory scholars believe that television is still the dominant medium and should therefore be the only medium studied within cultivation research (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Other scholars posit that with expanded platforms for content, cultivation research needs to evolve to include other technologies. For example, frequent use of Facebook has been linked with body image concerns in adolescent and young adult women (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). There is a deeper process that occurs that is not being captured by cultivation theory alone. Although media in all its forms may cultivate particular images for emulation, media consumers also engage in comparison of self with others.

### **Social Comparison Theory**

Social comparison theory is a newer addition to the sociocultural model that aids our understanding of body image (Tiggemann, 2011). Social comparison theory dates back to the established concept of social influence (Festinger, 1954). When individuals evaluate their opinions and skills, they use the attributes of others (i.e., peers, characters in the media, etc.) as a benchmark.

Appraisals of self-evaluation are of particular relevance to body image research, especially when reviewed in the context of cultivation theory. Media transmit information about societal expectations and norms (Kramer, Ingledew, & Iphofen, 2007). The work of Festinger (1954) indicates that attractive or esteemed referent groups may lead the learner to internalize pressure and succumb to the group to conform to the norm. This is of consequence to media effects research because media images frequently celebrate attractive, successful, unrealistic paragons. The amount of time adolescents consume appearance-focused media correlates positively with internalization of the Eurocentric thin ideal, creating a drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction (Levine & Chapman, 2011). Ultimately, media consumption influences self-evaluation and self-improvement appraisals through relentless popularizing and engendering of the idolized and idealized superthin. Although males also make social comparisons, Latina females are more likely to have disordered eating behaviors and appearance concerns (Lopez, Corona, & Halfond, 2013), which is why the focus here is on Latina females.

Stokes (2012) tested the sociocultural model of body image with Latina participants and found the model was upheld. Television consumption predicted awareness of the thin ideal, and perceived pressure from important others (i.e., friends and family) positively predicted social comparison. Moreover, internalization was associated positively with social comparison, and social comparison was associated positively with body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness.

In another study, researchers asked young women to view a set of pictures and then list 20 descriptive statements about themselves. After viewing sexualized photos, young women, regardless of ethnic identity, were more likely to mention their shape and size in their self-descriptions than those viewing nonsexualized photos (Schooler & Daniels, 2014). It is interesting to note that young women were significantly more likely to mention their ethnic identity in their self-descriptions when they viewed sexualized pictures of Caucasian women. Compared with those who did not mention an ethnic identity, young women who identified as Latina in their self-descriptions were able to describe their bodies more positively



(Schooler & Daniels, 2014). This provides evidence for the buffering effect of ethnicity on body image and also means that women are more likely to use targets similar to themselves for body comparison. The latter point about comparison targets was confirmed by Fardouly and Vartanian (2015), who found that young Latina women more often compare themselves with their close friends and celebrities and less so with their family members.

The literature on the social comparison effects of media character models and peers on body dissatisfaction is mixed. In an experiment, Hispanic women were exposed to thin-ideal and non-thin-ideal media, and the exposure had no impact on body dissatisfaction. The researchers concluded that both peers and television models made the women feel inferior, but this did not significantly equate to body dissatisfaction (Ferguson, Muñoz, Contreras, & Velasquez, 2011). Similarly, Ferguson, Muñoz, Garza, and Galindo (2014) determined that young women were more likely to compare themselves with high-status peers on social media than with television characters. With these mixed results, both peers and media characters may have some social comparison effects, but their determinants require further study.

Research has found that one of the most important determinants of body dissatisfaction and eating pathology, regardless of social comparison target, is internalization of thin or athletic ideals (Warren, Schoen, & Shafer, 2010). Warren et al. (2010) stated, "Increased thin- and athletic-ideal internalization, increased social comparison to models in the media, higher BMI, younger age (i.e., closer to 14 years old than 19 years old), and being a girl were all significant predictors of eating pathology" (p. 721). Internalization of the body ideals requires that the individual be aware of the ideals.

The results of Warren and Rios (2013) determined that awareness of Western ideals positively predicted perceived acculturation pressure, perceived acculturation pressure positively predicted athletic-ideal internalization, and athletic-ideal internalization positively predicted body image problems. It is perhaps the internalization of thin or athletic ideals that matters more than the comparison target. What are the factors that determine internalization? Ethnic identity has been found to mitigate the effects of social comparison (Schooler & Daniels, 2014), but what are the ethnicities that cause the buffering effect? Factors that have been left out of extant research are Latina, Hispanic, and Chicana subgroups, which have their own unique cultures.

To date, the literature has ignored examinations of what separates the body image of one Latina subgroup from that of another Latina subgroup. For example, more needs to be known about how Mexican

Americans may differ from Puerto Ricans, the two largest Latino groups in the United States. Also, strong identification with ethnic heritage overall has been found to offer immunity against the body norms from mainstream culture (Schooler & Daniels, 2014; Schooler & Lowry, 2011), but more evidence is needed given that this area is understudied.

### **Aggregation of Latino Cultures**

Phinney (1992) refers to ethnic identity as the way individuals view themselves as parts of a larger whole. This identification process provides members with a framework to assess belongingness to a particular group (e.g., subgroup or microcultural group, non-mainstream group). Fujioka, Ryan, Agle, Legaspi, and Toohey (2009) explain that the identity framework allows individuals to process mediated information about themselves. They further contend that individuals do not inherently possess knowledge of their self-concepts; instead, this knowledge flows from interaction in social environments with significant others and with significant entities—family, friends, community organizations, and the media.

Fujioka et al. (2009) assert, “The way people respond to media depends on not only the mere membership of a specific group identity, such as White or Black, but also the strength or the level of the racial or ethnic identity” (p. 454). Moreover, depictions of race and ethnicity in mass media are often from the frame of the mainstream (i.e., Caucasian) culture, substantiating mainstream norms that may or may not support the norms of microcultures (National Association of Hispanic Journalists, 2007). These mainstream norms include depictions of beauty that correlate with success and power while excluding deviations from the mainstream norm.

Cultural characteristics may underlie differences unknown to this point when samples are collapsed into a pan-ethnic group or when studies use only one ethnic subgroup (Breitkopf, Littleton, & Berenson, 2007; Schooler & Lowry, 2011; Warren, Gleaves, Cepeda-Benito, Fernandez, & Rodriguez-Ruis, 2005). While Latino heritage individuals are often assumed to share the same culture and language, national origin (and thus cultural uniqueness) plays a role in distinguishing one subgroup from another (Gracia, 2008; Umana-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002). These differences are important to consider in determining the role that ethnicity plays in body image.

The scant evidence on body image reported in the literature aggregates all Latino groups without accounting for individual subgroup differences. Extant research does not identify differences that may exist between Puerto Rican and Mexican American or Dominican American women (Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2001). When controlling for BMI, Frederick,

Forbes, Grigorian, and Jarcho (2007) found that college-age Hispanic women did not differ in body satisfaction from their Caucasian counterparts (Frederick et al., 2007). However, they recognized that broadly categorizing Hispanics into one cohesive unit for analysis was a limitation because it does not account for acculturation—change toward mainstream/host culture—occurring within one group and across ethnic subgroups. Acculturation increases stress for non-mainstream individuals, resulting in an increased risk for mental health issues (Schooler & Lowry, 2011).

Schooler and Lowry (2011) explain that cultural change processes involve a number of stress factors that include acclimating to a new language and a complex set of cultural norms, in addition to experiencing discrimination. So, acculturating women must negotiate beauty from the cultural perspective of both their ethnic group and the majority culture, and adopting the Eurocentric idealized thin as the norm may lead to greater body image concerns.

Taken together, the information presented here emphasizes the importance of viewing Latino and Hispanic populations as individual cultural groups instead of aggregating all cultures together. Psychological and disordered eating implications are imminent without accurate research to assist with interventions.

### **Psychological and Disordered Eating Implications**

#### **Psychological Implications**

Fortunately, there are some positive psychological implications. When Latina females receive social support from family and friends, thin-ideal internalization decreases (Cordero, 2011). In the study of Romo and Mireles-Rios (2016), they asked Latina mothers and daughters to talk about their bodies. Results indicated that when mothers feel good about their bodies, they are more likely to give body esteem-enhancing messages. Girls who expressed positive feelings about their bodies were less likely to receive criticism from their mothers. Conversely, girls who were dissatisfied with their bodies received more criticism from their mothers. Mothers who were dissatisfied with their bodies were less likely to give body esteem-enhancing messages and were more critical.

Unfortunately, not all Latina females have the social support that they need. Studies have confirmed that BMI is the strongest correlate of body disturbances; the higher the BMI, the greater the body disturbance is for Latina women (Ferguson et al., 2011; Ferguson et al., 2014; Mirza, Davis, & Yanovski, 2005). Other predictors of body dissatisfaction include mood disorders, like depression and anxiety (Ferguson et al., 2011). Increased BMI also leads to a decrease in self-esteem and caloric restrictions in order

to lose weight (Mirza et al., 2005). In other words, the higher the BMI, the more likely the female will have a lower self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and body disturbances. These psychological effects have the potential to lead to disordered eating.

### **Disordered Eating Implications**

Historically, scholars and clinicians assumed that (non-White) ethnicity confers protection or buffers against distorted body image in females (Stice, 1994; Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1986). However, other scholars have found the buffering hypothesis to be false (Viladrich et al., 2009). Shaw, Ramirez, Trost, Randall, & Stice (2004) discovered that previous differences in body image protection have dissipated, and they explain this by suggesting that ethnic minority groups may have succumbed to the sociocultural pressures previously distressing only Caucasian women (Shaw et al., 2004). Schooler and Lowry (2011) contend that “body policing” is increased in Latino families because of widespread concerns over weight-related health problems (e.g., diabetes). Policing the body for beauty-related purposes is also done, especially in the context of clothing and fashion, as well as in matters of food and diet (Winch, 2011).

There are different motivations for family and community members to engage in body policing, which can be confusing and contradictory. In a qualitative report, Rubin, Fitts, and Becker (2003) captured how some Hispanic females perceive the body and the nature of messages (e.g. what people say) from significant others (e.g., family and friends) about the body. One participant who was interviewed shared the following about her interactions with her mother regarding her weight:

Once you're normal [weight] it's okay, but if [my mom] sees you gaining a little weight then she'll say something ... It kinda gets you mad ... but when I lost the weight, like I told you I lost like 10 pounds or so, then she would say, “Well ooooooh, you're getting so thin,” and they kept bugging me about how I was getting so thin, but yet when I gained 2, 3 pounds you know they were saying, “Ooooooh, you're getting a double [chin].” ... So there was like this contradicting information. (p. 61)

Schooler and Lowry (2011) also indicate that Latina adolescents express a desire to achieve the same Eurocentric thin ideal and that adolescents try to lose weight at the same rate reported by Caucasian female adolescents. They posit that male and female Latinos are as likely, if not more likely, to

develop eating disorders versus any other ethnic group (Schooler & Lowry, 2011).

Researchers who specifically focused on Latino eating disorder prevalence found that estimates are likely to be similar to what is found in Caucasian populations (Alegria et al., 2007). However, standard eating disorder definitions may not appropriately account for cultural differences. For example, the role of acculturation may facilitate awareness and internalization of the idealized thin (Alegria et al., 2007). In fact, birth outside the United States may confer some protection against eating disorder development—perhaps immunity toward adopting the thin ideal (Alegria et al., 2007; Schooler & Daniels, 2014). This might be attributed to the buffering hypothesis, which claims that women of color, or non-White women, in the United States possess immunity to Eurocentric (i.e., mainstream culture) definitions of ideal beauty. More research needs to be done to corroborate these findings and examine effects from different Latino cultures.

What is known is that the internalization of thin ideals leads to body dissatisfaction, which leads to dieting behaviors (Boie, Lopez, & Sass, 2013). The exact point at which the multitude of pressures on Latina women becomes disordered eating has not yet been discovered. Right now the tendency exists, and therefore research needs to seek precise determinants of disordered eating.

## **Future Directions**

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

One avenue for future research that has not been explored in any depth is social cognitive theory. Bandura and Walters (1963) asserted that people receive reinforcement for learning new behaviors through vicarious learning (watching other people learn new behaviors). When behavioral models are rewarded, the rewards serve as vicarious reinforcement for observers. As applied to body image and eating pathology, females can develop an unrealistic idea of the perfect body by watching unnaturally thin women in the media attain rewards associated with fame, beauty, power, and luxury items.

According to Bandura (1986), behavior is understood by using the triadic model of reciprocity, in which behavior, personal factors (i.e., cognition and affect), and the environment interact simultaneously. This combined interaction is called reciprocal determinism. Whereas behaviors are the observable performance in which the individual engages, personal factors encompass cognitive processes, motivation, and affect (Bandura, 1989). Personal factors also include self-efficacy, which is the personal

belief and self-confidence that one can successfully perform an activity or action. Positive self-efficacy regarding health-related matters or body image might provide motivation to achieve health- and body-related goals—even unhealthful or pathological goals of low body weight.

Lastly, environment refers to all things external to the learner and offers the opportunity for both social interaction and vicarious learning (including media) (Bandura, 1986). A household where parents encourage dieting and weight control predicts body dissatisfaction (Kluck, 2010; Neumark-Sztainer, Paxton, Hannan, Haines, & Story, 2006). Jones (2011) asserts, “Parents express their expectations and beliefs about appearance in the lifestyle patterns they create for eating, dieting, exercise, and evaluation” (p. 111). While serving as models to teach, adult family members also facilitate what toys children receive and the media children consume. Adult family members may also inadvertently foster negative body image in children and adolescents through weight-related teasing (Jones, 2011). The advantage of social cognitive theory is that it takes into consideration the vast influences on our behavior. The literature using this theory is negligible, which leaves an entirely unexplored avenue for research.

One study using the social cognitive theory framework examined media influences on a woman’s choice of Facebook profile picture. Results suggest that television viewing directly predicts showing the body and wearing revealing clothing (Kapidzic & Martins, 2015). Similar findings were discovered for magazine pictures, but the effect was mediated by internalization of the thin ideal (Kapidzic & Martins, 2015). It is argued that television blatantly depicts rewards for thinness and punishments for fatness, but rewards and punishments in magazines are not as salient and therefore missed by readers (Kapidzic & Martins, 2015). This causes the mediation of thin-ideal internalization between magazine exposure and profile picture choice.

Clearly, more research needs to expound on body image issues with social cognitive theory. As was true of early body image research, this one study focused on Caucasian women, which limits its generalizability.

### **Positive Role Models**

Another direction for research is the effects of positive portrayals on body image for Latina women. “Diversifying portrayals of figure sizes among Latina women is certainly an important strategy, not only in countering the stereotypical body images of Latina women but also in potentially decreasing the risk for body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and eating

disorders” (Franko et al., 2013, p. 249). Messages featuring Latinas of all body types need to reach women of all ages.

Each Latino culture should be considered before any intervention campaign or media content is created in order for the characters to be relatable to the viewers. Women socially compare themselves with those who are most like them (Schooler & Daniels, 2014). Bandura (1986) states that for a model to be attractive to the viewer, perceived similarities (current or aspired) between the model and the viewer need to be present if vicarious learning is to occur. Although most of the research has focused on negative effects, positive effects also warrant future investigation.

### **Cultural Aggregation**

Media effects researchers must parse out the intricate differences among Latino subgroups to fully understand media’s impact on body image. There is a vast array of Latino cultural characteristics that contribute to media use and body evaluations. Schooler and Lowry (2011) point to the significance of multiethnic identities:

In addition to considering individuals identifying themselves as monoethnic (identifying with one ethnicity), or as having a “dual ethnicity” (e.g., identifying as Black and Cuban), it is necessary for research to appreciate the role a multiethnic identity (identifying with three or more ethnicities) plays in developing body image values. (p. 241)

Ethnic identity is a complex contributor to body satisfaction, and scholars should account for this in future investigations.

In order to have generalizable findings, though, it is imperative that the samples used in research comprise all Latino identities. It is common to sample Latino college students or Latino populations from a specific area within the United States (Schooler, Lowry, & Biesen, 2012). These populations are biased toward those who attend college or are ethnic majorities in a particular part of the country. Scholars need to ensure that all Latino identities have an equal chance to participate in body image research.

### **Conclusion**

The Latino population will continue to grow in the United States as a result of increasing birth rates and immigration (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Latinos are already the largest ethnic minority group in the United States; therefore, their sheer numbers will stimulate additional population growth,

even in the absence of further immigration. Nielsen (2012) projected that Latinos would contribute 60% of the population growth within the next 5 years. Likewise, it was expected that with expansion would come even greater social and cultural shifts.

Body image is how a person perceives himself or herself. In some cases, a negative perception is exacerbated to a pathological level, resulting in disordered eating and eating disorders. Body image also has implications for self-esteem, interpersonal communication and relationships, and overall health and well-being. This exploration, therefore, is of importance, especially because eating disorders cause more deaths than any other form of mental illness (Academy for Eating Disorders, 2014; National Institute of Mental Health, 2014).

In the future, this work might very well serve the community by encouraging the design and evaluation of a body image campaign tailored for Latinas of various ages and ethnic subgroups. Campaigns should endeavor to inform viewers about media literacy. Results could be used to deconstruct media messages and champion literacy to combat the effects of objectification and the promotion of a single, mainstream beauty ideal. Further study might also produce results transferable to an advocacy and policy level to stimulate widespread change in media depictions of Latinas, and of women in general. Mobilization of this ethnic minority community might lead to improved health and a better quality of life through disease prevention, the delay of disease onset, and/or more sophisticated disease management.



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