

“I Am Not a Skinny Toothpick and Proud of It.” Latina Adolescents’ Ethnic Identity and Responses to Mainstream Media Images

Body Image

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Abstract

Using a quasi-experimental design, 118 Latina girls, ages 13-18, viewed five color photographs of White women. Girls viewed either images of sexualized women or images of non-sexualized women. After viewing the images, girls were asked to complete the sentence stem, "I am..." 20 times. Thirty percent of girls spontaneously described their ethnicity in one of their sentence completions. Spontaneous use of ethnicity was taken as an indicator of the salience of ethnic identity. Among girls who viewed sexualized, thin-ideal White media images, spontaneously using an ethnic descriptor was related to more positive descriptions of one's own body and appearance. Analyses supported the premise that ethnic identity may act as a protective factor, buffering Latina girls from the negative effects of viewing sexualized, thin-ideal White media images.

Keywords: adolescence, body image, media, ethnic identity

“I am not a skinny toothpick and proud of it.” Latina adolescents’ ethnic identity and responses to mainstream media images

Early work on body image conceptualized body dissatisfaction as a concern primarily of Caucasian girls and women (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Initial efforts to include women of color in research on body image examined African-American women, and this work seemed to suggest that women of color experienced fewer body image concerns compared to White women. (Wildes & Emery, 2001). More recent meta-analytic evidence suggests that differences in body image between Caucasian girls/women and girls/women of color may be diminishing in some areas, but are not altogether disappearing (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Roberts, Cash, Feingold, & Johnson, 2006). Additionally, there now exists a growing literature examining body image specifically among Latina girls and women, and this evidence indicates that Latina girls frequently report body dissatisfaction at comparable rates to Caucasian girls, and in many cases Latinas report a higher frequency of disordered eating (Schooler & Lowry, 2011). There is some evidence, however, that possessing a strong ethnic identity may buffer Latinas against mental health concerns (Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002). Accordingly, the present study investigated the role of ethnic identity in Latina girls’ responses to sexualized and non-sexualized media images of Caucasian women.

Increasingly, women in mainstream media, including television, magazines, and movies, are depicted in sexualized ways (Murnen, 2011; Murnen & Smolak, 2013; Tiggemann, 2013). Indeed, a content analysis of 58 popular U.S. magazines found that one out of two advertisements featuring women depicted them as sex objects (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). Mainstream media also present a female body ideal that is extremely slim (Fouts & Burggraf, 1999; Lin, 1998). Across multiple media genres, the women depicted are significantly thinner

than women in the actual population, and in many cases are thin enough to be deemed undernourished (Barber, 1998; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999, 2000; Rubinstein & Caballero, 2000; Signorielli, 1993; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992). Thus, today, media tend to depict thin, sexy women as the dominant representation of female bodies (Murnen, 2011; Murnen & Smolak, 2013; Tiggemann, 2013).

According to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), when adolescents compare themselves to idealized body ideals, they become dissatisfied with their own bodies, making what has been termed an upward social comparison. Indeed, researchers find that women who frequently compare themselves to media images are more dissatisfied with their bodies and that the effects of media exposure on body image are stronger when individuals are encouraged to conduct such comparisons (see Myers & Crowther, 2009 for meta-analysis).

Some adolescents, however, may resist comparing themselves to mainstream media images. Social comparisons are typically made primarily to a target who is similar to oneself on salient attributes because such comparisons are believed to provide more relevant information for accurate self-appraisal (Crocker & Major, 1989). Adolescents, who are able to distance themselves from media images, might therefore be able to resist comparing their bodies to the mainstream media ideal, and might consequently feel better about themselves. Based on this premise, some have argued that girls and women of color may be buffered from the negative effects of viewing mainstream media (e.g., Milkie, 1999). Many ethnic minority youth do not phenotypically or culturally resemble the White women who are most frequently portrayed in mainstream media. As a result, some girls of color may avoid comparing themselves to White media images, and may instead look for standards of beauty that are more personally and culturally relevant. Research with African-American women, specifically, has partially supported

this premise. African-American girls and women have identified mainstream media images as less attractive and less personally relevant than their Caucasian peers (Fujioka, Ryan, Agle, Legaspi, & Toohey, 2009; Milkie, 1999). In both survey and experimental research, exposure to media images of Black women predicts African-American women's body image outcomes, but exposure to mainstream, media images does not (Frisby, 2004; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004).

This protection from the negative effects of viewing mainstream media is, by no means, absolute, however. Qualitative data from focus groups indicate that many Black women do feel pressure to conform to dominant beauty ideals and may feel bad about their own bodies when they compare themselves to media images (Poran, 2006). For some girls and women of color, the ethnicity of a woman in a media image may not be an especially salient characteristic when selecting a target for comparison. Thus, these girls and women may compare their own bodies to idealized White women's bodies. In sum, girls and women of color who strongly identify with their ethnic/racial group might resist comparisons with Caucasian media images, whereas girls and women of color with weaker ethnic/racial identification may compare themselves to White women in media. Based on this premise, the current study will examine whether and how Latina adolescents leverage ethnic identity to resist comparing themselves to mainstream, White media images.

Media Use and Latino/a Body Image

Latino/a youth report watching over five hours of television a day, nearly two hours more than their Caucasian peers and slightly less than African-American youth (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). The television viewing of Latino/a youth has increased dramatically over the past decade, faster than among any other ethnic group, as Latino/a youth begin to rely on new

platforms (e.g., the internet) for viewing television content (Rideout et al., 2010). Television viewing is generally split between mainstream television and Spanish-language programming on networks like Telemundo and Univision (Subervi-Velez & Colsant, 1993). Latino/a youth also report regular magazine reading (Rideout et al., 2010), and mainstream women's magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *People*, and *InStyle*, are noted as most popular among Latino/a youth (Pompper & Koenig, 2004). Content analysis research indicates that Latino/as are severely underrepresented in mainstream magazine advertisements, with Latino/as appearing in fewer than five percent of ads featuring human models (Taylor & Bang, 1997). As a result, Latino/a readers rarely see individuals from their ethnic group in mainstream magazines; instead, they are exposed to media images of White women and men at a high rate.

Empirical research documenting the effects of mainstream media on Latina girls' and women's body image is limited, but the available evidence indicates that Latinas may be internalizing and comparing themselves to mainstream media images. In focus group research, Latinas have described being critical of media images that they see as being excessively thin and primarily White; however, at the same, they have reported using those images to evaluate their own bodies (Goodman, 2002; Schooler & Trinh, 2010; Viladrich, Yeh, Bruning, & Weiss, 2009). Indeed, internalization of media ideals has been shown to predict body dissatisfaction and disordered eating among male and female Latino/a adolescents (Ayala, Mickens, Galindo, & Elder, 2007), even though these associations may be weaker among Latina women relative to Caucasian women (Warren, Gleaves, Cepeda-Benito, del Carmen Fernandez, & Rodriguez-Ruiz, 2005). Additionally, survey research documents associations between mainstream media use and Latino/a adolescents' body image (Rivadeneyra, Ward, & Gordon, 2007; Schooler, 2008). Specifically, in a sample of Latino/a high school boys and girls, youth who watched more hours

of mainstream soap operas and those who watched more movies reported greater body dissatisfaction than their peers (Rivadeneyra et al., 2007). In a longitudinal study of Latina middle and high school girls, watching mainstream sitcoms was associated with decreased body satisfaction (Schooler, 2008). In summary, research evidence suggests that exposure to mainstream media, which frequently portrays a thin, sexy ideal for women, poses a risk to the body image development of Latina adolescents.

Ethnic Identity as a Protective Factor

Ethnic identity development involves a complex negotiation of one's self-concept and identification in relation to one's ethnic group (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987). For many children of color, ethnic identity becomes especially salient during adolescence as this is an active period for identity development in general (Erikson, 1968; French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006), and developing a strong ethnic identity may promote mental health at this time. Specifically, it has been argued that strong identification with one's ethnic group functions as a protective factor for mental health, providing resources to defend against psychological stressors such as discrimination (Crocker & Major, 1989; Mossakowski, 2003; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Among Latino/as, specifically, ethnic identity predicts positive psychological outcomes, such as self-esteem (Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002), and there is some evidence that it may serve to protect against stress related mental health concerns, such as depression (Torres & Ong, 2010). Accordingly, it is reasonable to ask whether ethnic identity might also buffer adolescents of color from threats to body image. Indeed, research evidence with African-American women indicates that ethnic identity may serve such a protective function (Fujioka et al., 2009; Sabik, Cole, & Ward, 2010; Schooler et al., 2004; Zhang, Dixon, & Conrad, 2009)

Although little research has directly examined ethnic identity and body image among Latina women, associations between acculturation and body image have been studied. Acculturation refers to one's orientation toward and immersion in the dominant culture relative to the culture of one's heritage and is typically measured by asking about engagement in cultural practices including language use. In contrast, ethnic identity focuses on one's sense of identification with and belonging to one's ethnic group and, accordingly, is more subjective than typical behavioral measures of acculturation. Still, as both are components of the larger construct of cultural identity, measures of the acculturation and ethnic identity tend to be correlated among Latino/a adolescents (Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007). Scholars examining acculturation and body image point to differences in beauty ideals among different cultures. Although evidence does not unilaterally support a larger ideal body size in Latino culture (Cachelin, Rebeck, Chung, & Pelayo, 2002; Crago, Shisslak, & Estes, 1996; Franko & Herrera, 1997; Poran, 2002), young Latina women have articulated a body ideal that has more "feminine curves" than the dominant White ideal (de Casanova, 2004; Goodman, 2002; Rubin, Fitts, & Becker, 2003; Viladrich et al., 2009). Instead of a thin-ideal, Latino culture may value a "thick" ideal or "buen cuerpo," comprised of a slender but curvy body, with a thin waist, big breasts and hips and a round behind (de Casanova; Goodman, 2002; Greenfield, 2002). However, greater acculturation into mainstream US culture may lead Latinas to privilege the excessively slim body ideal depicted in mainstream media. Indeed, greater acculturation has been associated with higher incidence of body image concerns in both Latina adults (Chamorro & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Jane, Hunter & Lozzi, 1999) and adolescents (Gowen, Hayward, Killen, Robinson, & Taylor, 1999; Pumariega, 1986).

When acculturation and media use are considered in conjunction with one another, findings suggest a complex interplay between the two variables. In a longitudinal study of Latina body image (Schooler, 2008), an initial main effect for acculturation emerged, such that girls who were more acculturated showed a decline in body satisfaction across adolescence. This association, however, became non-significant after controlling for the effect of viewing television, indicating that acculturation may promote more frequent viewing of mainstream television and more engagement with the dominant body ideal that is displayed on mainstream programs. Moreover, acculturation status appeared to moderate concurrent associations between media exposure and body satisfaction. Specifically, it was primarily among more acculturated participants that mainstream television viewing was associated with body dissatisfaction. Although ethnic identity was not directly investigated as a moderator of media effects in this study, these findings indicate that some Latina adolescents may turn to the mainstream media to learn about body ideals, whereas other Latinas may not.

For Latina adolescents growing up in the US, determining which media images are personally or culturally relevant can be a complicated task. Due in part to complex histories of colonization and immigration, Latino/as inhabit both real and metaphorical “borderlands,” bridging multiple cultures, races, traditions, and communities (Anzaldúa, 1987). The pan-ethnic label “Latino” generally refers to individuals with diverse ethnic backgrounds, including individuals of Mexican, Caribbean, Central American, and South American descent (Oboler, 1995). Latino/as also vary racially, including individuals who might be classified as Black, White, *Indio* (Indian), and *Trigueño* (olive skinned) (Zentella, 1997). Latino/as in the US similarly have a multitude of ethnic labels to choose from including pan-ethnic labels (e.g., Latino/a), national labels (e.g., Dominican, Salvadorian), and bicultural or binational labels (e.g.,

Chicano/a, Mexican-American), and each of these labels can hold specific significance for an adolescent (Buriel, 1987). Consequently, ethnic identification, the process by which individuals claim an ethnic label, can be a challenging task for Latino/a youth.

Ethnic identification can be an important component of ethnic identity development (Phinney, 1990), and evidence suggests that Latino/a adolescents, compared to other youth, may adopt ethnic identifications that are especially fluid (Nishina, Bellmore, Witkow, & Nylund-Gibson, 2010). For example, using a nationally representative sample of Latino/a high school students, Eschbach and Gomez (1998) found that 19% of adolescents who self-identified as “Hispanic” in 10th grade identified as “non-Hispanic” in 12th grade. Adolescents who spoke only English and who attended schools with few other Latino/a students were especially likely to identify as non-Hispanic by 12th grade. In another sample of adolescents from an ethnically diverse US high school, Latino/a adolescents most frequently selected a bicultural reference group label as opposed to a mainstream or strongly ethnic identification (Rotheram-Borus, 1990). Flexibility in one’s own ethnic identification could result in more flexible identifications with media characters. Indeed, research examining Latino youth’s media diets indicate that many Latino adolescents are engaging with mainstream media, Spanish-language media, and Black-oriented media (Schooler, 2008; Vargas, 2006). Ethnic identity may moderate the extent to which media models from these diverse sources are considered to be valid targets for comparison.

The Present Study

As described above, previous research indicates that Latina girls report high rates of body image concerns (Schooler & Lowry, 2011) and that these concerns are associated with mainstream media use (Rivadeneyra et al., 2007; Schooler, 2008). Associations between media

use and body image appear to be shaped, in part by cultural factors, but to date no research has examined whether ethnic identity moderates associations between exposure to the beauty ideals in mainstream media and body image concerns among Latina adolescents. If ethnic identity does contribute to positive attitudes about the body, two potential hypotheses can be considered. First, ethnic identity might serve a promotive function, increasing mental health and well-being generally, resulting in increased body satisfaction. If ethnic identity functions this way, it would be associated directly with body satisfaction, but would not minimize media effects on body satisfaction. Second, ethnic identity might serve a buffering function for body image, helping girls to resist the negative effects of viewing the thin, sexy ideal for women in mainstream media. If this were the case, ethnic identity might not have a direct effect on body satisfaction, but could moderate the effects of exposure to White media models on body satisfaction. The current study used a quasi-experimental design to evaluate these two hypotheses. Latina adolescents viewed media images of White women who either conformed to the thin, sexy ideal or did not conform to the thin, sexy ideal (but were not overweight). If ethnic identity serves a promotive function, it should be associated with greater body satisfaction regardless of the media images viewed. If, however, ethnic identity serves a protective or buffering function, it should ameliorate the negative effects of viewing idealized images.

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of 118 Latina girls was recruited as part of a larger sample of 350 adolescent girls. Using a mixed-methods design, the parent study examined the impact of non-dominant media images of women (e.g., athletes) on girls' and young women's body perceptions and how media images of the thin, sexy ideal are perceived by these viewers. Girls were

recruited from six schools in California (four public high schools, one public middle school, and one private preparatory school). Latino/a students constituted the majority of the student body in one of the six schools; Caucasian students constituted the majority of the student body in the other five schools. Girls were in grades 8-12 at the time of data collection (ages 13-17, $M = 15.26$, $SD = 1.06$). Following completion of the study, girls received a nutritional bar and a media literacy workshop on body image and beauty.

Materials

Twenty color photographs of White women were used for the experimental stimuli. Photographs were selected from a variety of popular magazines including *Sports Illustrated*, *Sports Illustrated for Women*, *Glamour*, and *Marie Claire*. Photographs were initially classified into one of four categories representing four experimental conditions: (1) sexualized athletes, (2) non-sexualized athletes, (3) sexualized models, and (4) non-sexualized models. The parent study specifically examined representations of female athletes, however for the purposes of the current study, athlete and model conditions were collapsed, resulting in two conditions (1) sexualized women and (2) non-sexualized women.

Sexualized women were shown in bathing suits or lingerie, in poses that accentuated their slim bodies. Non-sexualized models were shown fully clothed and in poses that did not accentuate body size. Potential stimuli were presented to a pilot sample of 38 undergraduate students (74% female). For each photograph, students rated the woman's age, affect, and attractiveness and whether or not the photograph depicted the woman in a sexualized manner. To be included in any condition, the photographs had to feature a woman who was rated as between the ages of 20 and 30, as happy, and as attractive. Photographs included in the sexualized conditions were rated above 5 out of 6 on the sexualization scale. Photographs included in the

non-sexualized condition were rated below 4 on the sexualization scale. This procedure resulted in five photographs in each of the four conditions.

No text appeared on the images except for a name and occupation. For athletes, their actual names were included and their sports were listed as their occupation. Because the models were not well-known celebrities, fictional names were included alongside their photographs, and, in the non-sexualized, a fictional occupation was listed, such as “writer” or “advertising executive.” In the sexualized condition, occupation was listed as “model.” Additional details on the experimental stimuli can be found in Daniels (2009).

Procedure

Classroom teachers distributed an informational letter and consent form to high school students to take home to their parents. Parents were told that the author was conducting a project about adolescents’ thinking about photographs they see in popular magazines. If a parent signed the consent form, the adolescent was eligible to participate in the study. On the day of data collection, the second author asked individuals who had parental consent if they wanted to participate in a study about media images. If they agreed, they signed an assent form indicating their willingness to be in the study. Girls from 14 different classes in 6 different schools were tested in group administrations during one class period during school. Each class was randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Due to varying class sizes and varying proportions of Latina girls in each class, sample sizes varied by experimental condition ($n = 66$ sexualized women; $n = 50$ non-sexualized women). During the class session, girls were given a survey packet containing five color photographs and a variety of standardized measures to complete at their own pace. To ensure that participants were attending to the photographs, participants

completed a short writing exercise after each photograph. Responses to these prompts were not analyzed for the present study.

Measures

Body satisfaction. Participants completed a modified version of the Twenty Statements Test (TST). The TST was designed to allow participants to spontaneously describe themselves, based on the general premise that a salient attitude holds more importance for an individual and will be expressed spontaneously more readily than a less salient attitude (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). Following the approach of Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, and Twenge (1998), the TST instructions were modified to assess state self-perceptions conceptually related to the experiment and read as follows:

Viewing photographs of people can have an impact on people's views of themselves. Please take a moment to think about how looking at the photographs you saw at the beginning of this activity makes you feel about yourself and your identity. In the twenty blanks below please make up to twenty different statements about your self and your identity that complete the sentence "I am _____." Complete the statements as if you were describing yourself to yourself, not somebody else.

Seven teams of two independent coders classified responses to the TST into one of six categories derived from Fredrickson et al. (1998): (1) body shape and size (e.g., "I am thin," "I am overweight."); (2) appearance not specific to body shape and size (e.g., "I am beautiful," "I am ugly."); (3) physicality (e.g., "I am good at water polo," "I am weak."); (4) traits, abilities, hobbies, political affiliation (e.g., "I am friendly," "I am into singing."); (5) states and emotions (e.g., "I am tired," "I am hungry."), and; (6) uncodable or illegible. Categories were mutually exclusive. Before coding began, coders were trained with definitions of the categories and example statements for each category.

Inter-rater reliability was calculated for responses to the full sample of 350 girls. Inter-rater reliability within coders on each team ranged from good to excellent ($\kappa = .85-.96$). Because of concerns with consistent coding across teams, the second author reviewed all coding and made adjustments to coding when inconsistencies were detected. For example, it was discovered at the close of the coding process that some teams interpreted the statement “I am photogenic” as a trait while others considered it to be about physical appearance. These inconsistencies were minor and affected 5% of the coding. As a final check of inter-rater reliability, an independent judge, naïve to the study’s hypotheses, coded a sub-sample of 20% of the total set of responses into the six coding categories ($\kappa = .82$). This coder also categorized a different sub-sample of 20% of the responses from the three appearance and body-related categories (body shape/size, appearance, and physicality categories), which are of central interest in the present study ($\kappa = .97$).

After the category coding was completed, two categories (body shape/size and appearance) were selected for coding of the emotional tone of the responses. Objectification theory guided the coding scheme (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Responses were coded as positive (*e.g.*, “*I am beautiful*”), neutral/ambiguous (*e.g.*, “*I am a brunette*”), or negative (*e.g.*, “*I am fatter than all of my friends*”) by three independent coders who resolved discrepancies in their coding by discussion. Subsequently, an independent coder, naïve to the study’s hypotheses, coded the tone for a sub-sample of 20% of the responses from the three body-related categories ($\kappa = .80$). When discrepancies occurred between the primary and naïve coders, the former’s coding was used. The coding for emotional tone was used to calculate two average emotional tone scores for each participant, one for body shape/size and one for appearance. To calculate the overall emotional tone for body shape/size comments, the total number of negative comments

about the body was subtracted from the total number of positive comments about the body, and this value was then divided by the total number of comments about the body (positive, negative, and neutral). This process resulted in scores that ranged from -1.0 to 1.0, with higher scores indicating a more positive emotional tone. The same process was used to calculate overall emotional tone for appearance comments.

Ethnic identity. Ethnic identity was also assessed using the Twenty Statements Test. Based on the premise that salient attitudes are expressed more spontaneously than less salient attitudes, responses to the twenty statements test have been coded to assess the salience of various identities (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). In the current data, a portion of girls spontaneously mentioned their ethnicity in one or more of their twenty statements. For example, some girls stated, “I am Mexican,” “I am Latina,” or “I am Hispanic.” This spontaneous reference to ethnicity was considered to be a reflection of the centrality or salience of ethnic identity. Previous research has indicated that projective measures of ethnic/cultural identity, such as the Draw a Person (DAP) task correlate highly with standard survey measures of ethnic identity (Dudley, 2006). Asking girls to reflect at length about their ethnic identity might have prompted youth to think about ethnicity as they engage with White media images, and, as a result, might bias their responses. Assessing ethnic identity projectively, using the Twenty Statements Test, allowed us to observe how central ethnicity was to their self-definitions without specifically priming them to think about ethnicity. A second team of judges coded whether the participants included any reference to an ethnic group or label (e.g., “I am Latina”, “I am Boriqua”). References to skin tone (e.g., “I am dark skinned” or “I am pale”) were not included in this category. Latina girls may notice various phenotypic

differences between themselves and typical White media models, including differences in skin tone, hair color and texture, facial features, and body type. Although each of these may relate to ethnicity, we did not consider their mention to be necessarily indicative of one's ethnic identity. All responses were coded by both judges ($\kappa = .98$), and discrepancies were resolved by the first author.

Demographic information. On the final page of the survey packet, after all other measures, participants were asked to report basic demographic information including age, ethnicity, and parental education.

Results

Descriptive Results

Body statements. Forty-nine percent of participants filled in all 20 statements ($M = 14.98$ statements, $SD = 5.79$). Approximately 20% of these statements were coded as pertaining to body shape and size ($M = 1.56$ comments, $SD = 1.41$) or physical appearance ($M = 1.43$, $SD = 1.48$). Descriptive results, separated by photo condition, are shown in Table 1. For all girls combined, the average emotional tone for comments about the body was negative ($M = -.25$, $SD = .51$), indicating that when girls offered comments about their bodies' shape or size, negative comments (e.g., "I am overweight" or "I am a bit fat.") were more common than positive comments (e.g., "I am curvy" or "I am thin"). In contrast, the average emotional tone for comments about physical appearance was positive ($M = .11$, $SD = .71$), indicating that when girls offered comments about other aspects of their physical appearance not specific to body shape or size, positive comments (e.g., "I am pretty good looking," or "I am beautiful") were more common than negative comments (e.g., "I am ugly" or "I am weird looking.").

Spontaneous use of an ethnic identifier. Thirty percent of girls spontaneously described themselves in terms of ethnicity in one of their 20 statements. The most common response coded into this category was “I am Mexican,” shared by 19% of girls. Other statements included, “I am Mexican-American,” “I am Puerto Rican,” and “I am Latina.” Chi square analyses indicated that these spontaneous ethnic identifiers were more common from girls in the sexualized photo conditions (37%) than from girls in the non-sexualized conditions (20%), $\chi^2(1, n = 118) = 3.88$, $p = .049$, $\phi = .18$.

Associations between Use of an Ethnic Identifier and Body Statements

The central question of this study is the extent to which ethnic identity might moderate the effects of exposure to sexualized, White media images on the body image of Latina adolescents. Four separate two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to evaluate the body image statements of participants by type of photo and use of ethnic identifier. If ethnic identity serves a promotive function, we would expect to see a significant main effect of use of an ethnic identifier on the way participants talk about their own bodies and physical appearance. If, however, ethnic identity served a protective function, buffering youth from the effects of viewing sexualized images, we would expect to see an interaction between photo condition and use of an ethnic identifier. Age was included as a covariate in all analyses. To confirm the homogeneity of regression slopes, interactions between the covariate age and the independent variables were tested in preliminary analyses. None of these interaction were found to be significant.

The first ANOVA examined the total number of statements participants made about the shape and size of their bodies. A significant main effect was found for photo condition, $F(1, 111) = 5.58$, $p = .020$, $\eta^2 = .048$. Girls who saw the sexualized photos made significantly more

comments about their bodies' shape/size than girls who saw the non-sexualized photos. No significant main effect was found for use of an ethnic identifier, $F(1, 111) = 0.14, p = .710, \eta^2 = .001$. Additionally, the interaction between photo condition and use of an ethnic identifier on the total number of body shape/size statements was not significant, $F(1, 111) = 0.87, p = .354, \eta^2 = .008$.

The second ANOVA examined the emotional tone of the statements participants made about their bodies' shape or size. No main effect was found for photo condition, $F(1, 111) = 1.32, p = .254, \eta^2 = .012$, or for use of an ethnic identifier, $F(1, 111) = 0.31, p = .578, \eta^2 = .003$. However, the interaction between photo condition and use of an ethnic identifier on emotional tone was significant, $F(1, 111) = 3.95, p = .049, \eta^2 = .034$. To further examine the nature of this interaction, independent samples t-tests were conducted evaluating the effects of exposure to the sexualized images separately among girls who did and did not offer an ethnic identifier. Among girls who did not offer an ethnic identifier, the emotional tone of body shape/size statements for girls who saw the sexualized photos ($M = -.45, SD = .52$) was significantly more negative than for girls who saw the non-sexualized photos ($M = -.11, SD = .47$), $t(79) = 3.13, p = .002, d = 0.69$. Among girls who did offer an ethnic identifier, there was no difference in the emotional tone of body shape/size statements between girls who saw the sexualized photos ($M = -.17, SD = .50$) and those who saw the non-sexualized photos ($M = -.27, SD = .50$), $t(33) = -.51, p = .615, d = 0.20$. This interaction is illustrated in Figure 1.

The third ANOVA examined the total number of statements participants made about their physical appearance (not including comments about the shape and size of their bodies). No significant main effect was found for photo condition, $F(1, 111) = 1.14, p = .288, \eta^2 = .010$, or for use of an ethnic identifier, $F(1, 111) = 1.55, p = .216, \eta^2 = .014$. Additionally, the interaction

between photo condition and use of an ethnic identifier on the total number of body statements was not significant, $F(1, 111) = 0.16, p = .687, \eta^2 = .001$.

The fourth ANOVA examined the emotional tone of the statements participants made about their physical appearance. There was no main effect for photo condition, $F(1, 111) = 1.04, p = .311, \eta^2 = .009$, or for use of an ethnic identifier, $F(1, 111) = 0.06, p = .811, \eta^2 = .001$. The interaction between viewing the sexualized photo and use of an ethnic identifier on emotional tone was marginally significant, $F(1, 111) = 3.78, p = .054, \eta^2 = .033$. To further examine this result, independent samples t-tests were conducted evaluating the effects of exposure to the sexualized images separately among girls who did and did not offer an ethnic identifier. Among girls who did not offer an ethnic identifier, the emotional tone of appearance statements was significantly more negative for girls who saw the sexualized photos ($M = -.13, SD = .72$) than for girls who saw the non-sexualized photos ($M = .31, SD = .75$), $t(79) = 2.69, p = .009, d = 0.60$. Among girls who did offer an ethnic identifier, there was no difference in the emotional tone of appearance statements between girls who saw the sexualized photos ($M = .20, SD = .57$) and those who saw the non-sexualized photos ($M = .07, SD = .58$), $t(33) = -.62, p = .539, d = 0.23$. This interaction is illustrated in Figure 2.

Discussion

Previous research has suggested that many Latina adolescents are engaging with and possibly comparing themselves to mainstream media images, which frequently depict White women. Unlike African-American women who appear, in some cases, to be resistant to mainstream media images (Schooler et al., 2004), Latina adolescents who watch more mainstream, White television feel worse about their bodies than Latinas who watch less mainstream television (Schooler, 2008). Findings from the current study suggest, however, that

mainstream media effects on Latinas may be moderated by ethnic identity. Specifically, results indicate that strong ethnic identity may buffer Latina adolescents from the negative effects of viewing sexualized, White media images.

A significant main effect for photo condition indicated that, regardless of ethnic identity, girls who viewed the sexualized photos were more likely to focus on the shape and size of their bodies in their self-descriptions than girls who saw the non-sexualized photos. The photos in the sexualized condition explicitly emphasized women's bodies. Accordingly, it is not surprising that when asked to describe "how looking at the photographs... makes you feel about yourself and your identity," girls who saw the sexualized photos were more likely to describe their own bodies. Notably, however, the emotional valence of these comments depended on the girls' ethnic identity. Among girls who did not offer an ethnic identifier, viewing sexualized White media images had a negative impact on how girls described their own body and appearance. Indeed, girls who were in the sexualized photo condition and did not spontaneously mention their ethnicity reported the lowest emotional tone of all four groups when discussing their body shape and size and their physical appearance. In contrast, girls who identified themselves as Latina were able to look at sexualized, thin-ideal media images and describe their own bodies more positively. It is worth noting that for all four groups the average emotional tone of statements about body size and shape was still negative, and the effect size of the interaction was small. The frequent negative descriptions that girls provided about their bodies may be caused by a number of factors including family (Wertheim, Martin, Prior, Sanson, & Smart, 2002) or peer criticism (Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004) or being embedded within a culture of "fat talk," where girls criticize their weight or bodies to each other as part of a normative social bonding process (Nichter & Vuckovic, 1994).

Findings from the current study indicate that ethnic identity may not fully protect Latina girls from negative feelings about their bodies, but it might lessen the impact of exposure to idealized, White media images. Indeed, results suggest that use of an ethnic identifier may be one response to exposure to sexualizing media. Girls who viewed sexualized images were significantly more likely to offer their ethnicity as one of their twenty statements than other girls, suggesting that, for some Latinas, viewing stereotypical mainstream media images of White women may elicit identification with their own ethnicity. Some Latina girls may protect themselves from objectifying images of White women by affirming their ethnicity and thereby distancing themselves from the White media images. This potential process is illustrated by a 16-year-old girl in the sexualized photo condition. After viewing the five images of thin, White women in bathing suits, she declared in her statements, “I am a proud Latina,” and “I am not a skinny toothpick and proud of it.” In response to seeing thin-ideal, White images, some Latina girls, like this one, might leverage their ethnic identity to resist making upward social comparisons, and instead focus on the positive qualities of their bodies.

Similar support for moderation was found for statements about physical appearance. On average, girls described their physical appearance in positive terms; they used terms like “cute” or “pretty” more frequently than terms like “ugly” or “weird looking.” This pattern, however, did not hold for girls in the sexualized photo condition who did not spontaneously provide an ethnic identifier. Among these girls, positive and negative comments about physical appearance were equally frequent. Because of the marginal significance of the interaction term and the small effect size, conclusions must be taken with some caution, and additional research is needed to further examine this association.

Limitations and Future Directions

Given that data in this study were collected via surveys, it was not possible to determine unequivocally the valence of particular self-descriptors, e.g., “I am skinny” or “I am curvy.” We relied on existing research and theory to guide us in developing the coding scheme for emotional tone (e.g., de Casanova, 2004; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Goodman, 2002; Greenfield, 2002). Future research might include an interview component to elicit the feelings behind girls’ self-descriptors. Random assignment by class rather than by individual also limits the extent to which causal conclusions can be drawn about the effects of media exposure because classroom effects may be present. Additionally, because ethnic identity was not manipulated in the present study, causal conclusions about the role of ethnic identity on body image cannot be made.

The current study focuses on Latina girls’ interactions with White media images. As the representation of women of color in mainstream media increases, women of color will have more opportunities to compare themselves to women of their same ethnic and racial background (Zhang, Dixon, & Conrad, 2009). We have no reason to expect that the buffering effect of ethnic identity illustrated in the current study would extend to Latina girls’ interactions with Latina media models. It may, in fact, have the opposite effect. Latina girls with strong ethnic identity might be more likely to compare their own bodies to those of Latina media images, and consequently might be especially vulnerable to the negative effects of viewing idealized media images of Latina women. Accordingly, additional research is necessary to explore how ethnic identity contributes to Latina youth’s interactions with diverse media models.

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