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## Ethnic Identity and Body Ideal in Adolescent Girls

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Ethnic Identity and Body Ideal  
in Adolescent Girls

by

Erin E. Ramirez


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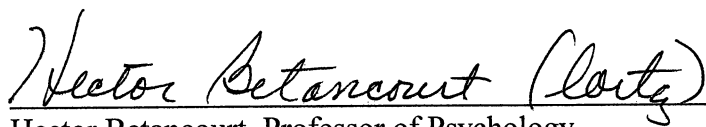
A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Experimental Psychology


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March 2005

Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this thesis in his/her opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Experimental Psychology.

 \_\_\_\_\_, Chairperson  
Janet Sonne, Professor of Psychology

 \_\_\_\_\_  
Hector Betancourt, Professor of Psychology

 \_\_\_\_\_  
Kelly Morton, Associate Professor of Psychology

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the individuals who helped me complete this study. I am grateful to the principals that opened their doors for me to collect data. I wish to thank the members of my committee for their valuable input and never-ending patience: Jan Sonne, Hector Betancourt, and Kelly Morton.

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

### Ethnic Identity and Body Ideal in Adolescent Girls

by

Erin E. Ramirez

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Clinical Psychology  
Loma Linda University, March 2005  
Dr. Janet Sonne, Chairperson

Adolescence is a period characterized by physical growth and maturation (Cobb, 1995). This normal biological process moves most American girls away from the thin ideal body shape that is dominant within the United States. Ethnic differences in ideal body size have in fact been found in several studies; but they have been shown based on ethnic group membership, not ethnic identification. The specific relationship of ethnic identity and body ideal for Mexican American, African American, and Anglo American adolescent females has not been clearly defined; Lopez, Blix, and Blix (1995) have hinted at the role of ethnic identification (through the assessment of acculturation) in the choice of body ideal. Ethnic identity is only an indirect measure of culture; however, the evaluation of impact of ethnic identity is a critical step in establishing that cultural variables influence an individual's ideal body size.

In order to determine whether ethnic identity influences African American, Mexican American, and Anglo American adolescent girls' choice of ideal body size, 335 adolescent girls ages 16-18 from two public high schools, one private high school, and a charity group in Southern California were asked to participate in the present study. Two African Americans, 12 Mexican Americans, and 20 Anglo Americans completed and



returned the questionnaires, achieving a 10.1% response rate. While the hypotheses of this study were not supported by the data, there were some interesting findings. One of the more prominent findings is that despite a relatively strong ethnic identity, the Mexican American and African American girls do not appear to be internalizing that aspect of their culture. They appear to be internalizing another cultural ideal, possibly the more pervasive high school cultural ideal of thinness for girls. It is also interesting that while there was not a significant difference between self body ideal among the groups, there was a significant difference between cultural ideals among groups. The African American and Mexican American girls appear to acknowledge the preference for a larger body ideal within their culture, while simultaneously not prescribing to it as demonstrated by their significantly thinner self body ideal. Based on the aforementioned findings, implications and suggestions for further research are provided.

## Introduction

Adolescence is a period characterized by physical growth and maturation (Cobb, 1995). Pubertal development in girls is accompanied by an average weight gain of 50 pounds, including 20-30 pounds of fat, much of it deposited in the hips, thighs, buttocks, and waist (Levine & Smolak, 2002). This normal biological process moves most American girls away from the thin ideal body shape that is dominant within the United States. Acceptance of this new physique is at least in part dependent on the cultural definition of the ideal body. Dynamic interactional theory suggests that these body ideals are perpetuated by the social interactions between the person and his or her environment (Lerner, 1978). These interactions, according to social learning theory, are a type of modeling that occurs in a culture. The media, family, and peers provide individuals with the culturally accepted body ideal. The extent to which a girl identifies with her ethnic group influences whether she will accept and internalize specific cultural standards, such as body ideals, forming a basic element of the girl's sense of self (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999).

In industrialized cultures, body image is probably the most important component of an adolescent's global self esteem (Levine & Smolak, 2002). This connection may be stronger during adolescence than in other age periods. During adolescence, the human body becomes more salient as a social object (Cash & Fleming, 2002). Physical appearance conveys basic information such as gender, race, and approximate age. It is what distinctly identifies a person within his or her social world. "Throughout history and across cultures, human beings have altered and adorned their outer appearance for

purposes of social communication” (Cash & Fleming, 2002, p. 277). However, regardless of actual physical appearance, an individual’s own perceptions, beliefs and feelings about their appearance to some degree determines how they believe others view them.

Therefore, a positive body image would facilitate social confidence and comfort, whereas a negative body image would lead to social inhibition and anxiety.

Because the thin beauty ideal is pervasive within the American culture, internalization of the thin ideal often results. Internalizing the thin beauty ideal potentially can result in the experience of a discrepancy between the ideal and one’s actual self. The discrepancy prompts body dissatisfaction for most girls because the ideal is impossible to attain for all but very few (Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2002). In general, negative body image is correlated with low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and obsessive-compulsive tendencies (Levine & Smolak, 2002). When a girl experiences a negative body image, it can lead to more serious issues, such as eating disorders (e.g., anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, compulsive overeating; Garner, 2002; Stice, 2002). Body image disturbance is one of the most common clinical features of eating disorders. According to Stice (2002), the construct of body image disturbance refers to “(1) internalization of the socioculturally prescribed body image ideal..., (2) negative subjective evaluations of one’s physical appearance..., and (3) distorted perceptions of body image” (p. 304). The importance of understanding the adverse effects of body image disturbances is underscored by the fact the majority of women in Western cultures report at least moderate body dissatisfaction (Stice, 2002). Therefore, it is likely that Western cultures have a larger discrepancy between ideal and actual body size due to a greater internalization of a thin ideal.

The purpose of this study is to clarify the true relationship between ethnic identity and body ideal. This study examines the relationship between ethnic identity and self body ideal, as well as the relationship between ethnic identity and the discrepancy between self and cultural body ideal. One of the main questions is: if an adolescent girl highly identifies with her ethnic group will she then internalize the group's body ideal, or will she internalize another cultural body ideal (e.g., the high school girl body ideal)? In exploring ethnic identity and body ideal an important step is taken in the understanding of the formation of body image in adolescent years.

## Review of the Literature

### *Identity Development*

Adolescence is a time when identities are formed. There are several theories pertaining to identity development (Banks, 2000; Campbell, Adams, & Dobson, 1984; Kamptner, 1988; Sarigiani, Camarena, & Petersen, 1993). One popular theory defines identity development according to a progression through four status types: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement (Banks, 2000; Campbell et al, 1984).

The first of these status types is diffusion. Individuals in this stage “express no immediate or urgent interest in the exploration of such things as occupational, religious, or political values and attitudes and report little or no personal commitment to the same” (Banks, 2000; Campbell et al, 1984). Diffused adolescents are overly compliant in peer-pressure contexts. Foreclosure, the second of the status types, is characterized by an establishment of personal commitments; however, parental values and attitudes are accepted without examination. Therefore, at this point in the development process, the possibility of a unique identity has not been explored. The third status type, moratorium, is marked by the engagement in a questioning and searching period. Self-definition is sought by commitments to religious, occupational, and political perspectives. This begins a period of being more socially effective in persuasion contexts. The final status type of identity achievement is a culmination of the searching process into a self-defined commitment. These adolescents appear more capable of establishing intimate social relations.

There are several factors that may influence the course of identity development. Kamptner (1988) found that security in the parent-adolescent relationship appears to influence the identity development process in late adolescence. More specifically, parental warmth and autonomy were found to predict familial security, which, in turn, enhanced identity development directly. These findings stress the mutual importance of connectedness and individuality for identity formation. The connectedness that adolescents feel with their parents through familial security and parental warmth, as well as the autonomy permitted by the parents indirectly affects the adolescents' social involvement, thus enhancing identity development. Connectedness and autonomy were found to enhance social confidence, which in turn enhanced identity development directly. Social confidence also enhanced identity development indirectly by first enhancing adolescents' social relatedness.

Included within familial factors, is the factor of culture. Females from a non-white, non-middle class, non-suburban background may have varied experiences of adjustment throughout the identity formation process (Sarigiani et al., 1993). Therefore, it is important to examine these multicultural differences. For example, parents from different cultures may interact differently with their children, affecting the identity formation process.

### *Ethnic Identity*

Identity formation is an integral part of adolescence. This process also includes forming an ethnic identity. The formation of an ethnic identity is a process that occurs among all ethnic groups, including Anglo American (Banks, 2000). It is important to distinguish ethnic identity from ethnicity. According to Betancourt and Lopez (1993),

ethnicity refers to groups that are “characterized in terms of a common nationality, culture, or language”(p. 631). However, it is possible for an individual to belong to a certain ethnic group, and actually identify with another ethnic group. Ethnic identity refers to the ideals, values, attitudes, and traditions that are adopted by the individual (Reese, Vera, & Paikoff, 1998; Rosenthal, Moore, & Taylor, 1983; Smith & Brookins, 1997).

The understanding of ethnic identity is important because it is implicated in the overall adjustment of minority group adolescents (Phinney, 1989). Ethnic identity development is an essential human need (Smith, 1991). It provides a sense of belonging and a sense of historical continuity for an individual. Ethnic identity begins to form in pre-adolescence and has been found to be relatively stable by late adolescence (Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997; Rotheram-Borus, Lightfoot, Moraes, Dopkins, & LaCour, 1998). There are several models of ethnic identity development (Phinney 1989). Many of these models are similar to the stages of identity development previously discussed. Some models focus on specific ethnic groups, while others can be generalized across ethnic groups. The stages, however, are, for the most part, theoretical, and have been predominantly studied using interviews that ask specific questions that correlate with the specific stages (Phinney, 1989).

One theory of ethnic identity formation for non-white individuals is that it evolves over several phases, and is influenced by a number of factors (Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997; Resnicow, Soler, Braithwaite, Selassie, & Smith, 1999; Stevens, 1997). According to one model proposed by Phinney and Kohatsu (1997), as well as Resnicow et al. (1999), the phases include preencounter, encounter or transition, exploration or immersion-emersion,

and internalization. The phases have been described according to ethnic identity development in the United States, where the dominant culture is white. Preencounter, a combination of diffuse and foreclosed identity, is characterized by pro-White attitudes, and conformity to the norms of the larger, white culture (Resnicow et al., 1999).

Individuals in this stage tend to take on the values and attitudes to which they have been exposed, without question (Phinney, 1989). Encounter involves questioning the existing views of the world (Resnicow et al., 1999). This transitional stage leads to exploration of the individual's own ethnic group. The main aspect of exploration, or moratorium, is a distancing from the dominant, white society. Individuals are involved in an effort to better understand themselves and their people (Phinney, 1989). The process culminates in an achieved, internalized ethnic identity, which tends to be more bicultural (Resnicow et al., 1999). Across all groups, an achieved identity is characterized by a clear, confident acceptance of oneself as a member of a minority group (Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1996).

Phinney (1989) examined the stages of ethnic identity development in Asian American, Black, Hispanic, as well as white tenth-grade students (ages 15-17). Ethnicity was self-identified, and both parents were of the same ethnicity. The students in this study were all American-born, in order to minimize confounding with a foreign identity. In this study she found evidence for three stages: diffusion, moratorium, and achieved. In the initial stage, she found that there was much overlap between diffusion and foreclosure; therefore, she considered them to be one stage. She also found that, for white students (27 of the 91 student sample), there was no evidence of any of the stages. Apparently the white adolescents were not aware of their own ethnicity apart from being American. She found that, of the 64 students minority group subjects (Asian-American,



Black, and Hispanic) interviewed, more than one-half of them were in the initial stage, diffusion, approximately 23% of them were considered to be in moratorium, and approximately 21% of them had attained an achieved ethnic identity.

While it is inferred from the term “ethnic identity development” that these processes apply to minority groups, it is not usually inferred that Anglo Americans proceed through the same process of ethnic identity development. However, there are several models of white ethnic identity development (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). In a model proposed by Rowe et al. (1994), there are three types of unachieved white racial consciousness (avoidant, dependent, and dissonant) and four types of achieved white racial consciousness (dominative, conflictive, reactive, and integrative).

The three types unachieved racial consciousness include those attitudes for which either exploration or commitment are lacking (Rowe et al., 1994). The avoidant type is characterized by a lack of consideration of one’s own white identity as well as an avoidance of concern for ethnic minority issues. The dependent type is characterized by the appearance of being committed to some set of attitudes regarding white racial consciousness; however, they have not personally considered alternative perspectives. The attitudes of these individuals are not internalized. The dissonant type is characterized by being clearly uncertain about his or her sense of white racial consciousness and ethnic minority issues. These individuals are open to new information because it might reduce their uncertainty, but they lack commitment to the ideas that they might express.

The four types of achieved white racial consciousness vary on views of ethnic minorities and their place in the society (Rowe et al., 1994). The dominative type is characterized by a strong ethnocentric perspective, which justifies the dominance of

ethnic minority individuals by the majority culture. These individuals feel a sense of superiority over ethnic minority groups. They tend to see little in common between them and members of other ethnic groups. White culture is seen as superior because white people have achieved more. The conflictive type is characterized by individuals who are opposed to obvious, clearly discriminatory practices, yet are usually opposed to any program or procedure that has been designed to reduce or eliminate discrimination. The reactive type is characterized by individuals who are aware of ethnic discrimination as a significant feature of American society and are reacting to this acknowledgment. These individuals tend to feel that they have much in common with ethnic minority people. The integrative type is characterized by an individual that displays a variety of behaviors derived from a pragmatic view of ethnic minority issues. These individuals value a culturally pluralistic society, and are comfortable interacting with people of all ethnicities.

The models of minority ethnic identity and white identity are quite different because of the underlying fact of power differential and the history of relations between whites and non-whites (Phinney, 1996). However, both include an emphasis on the process of exploration about ethnicity. A comparison of ethnic identity stages and “white racial consciousness” types can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Comparison of Ethnic Identity Models*

Ethnic Identity Stages	(Phinney, 1989)
Unexamined ethnic identity	
Diffusion	Little or no exploration of one's ethnicity
Moratorium	Exploration, accompanied by confusion about the meaning of one's ethnicity
Achieved Identity	Exploration, accompanied by a clear understanding and acceptance of one's ethnicity
White Racial Consciousness Types	(Rowe et al., 1994)
Unachieved racial consciousness	
Avoidant Type	Significance of racial issues ignored
Dependent Type	Attitudes based on others' opinions, not internalized
Dissonant Type	Formation of tentative attitudes; experiencing dissonance
Achieved racial consciousness	
Dominative Type	Strong ethnocentric perspective
Conflictive Type	Conflicted feelings regarding discrimination practices
Reactive Type	Reacting to discrimination
Integrative Type	Values a culturally pluralistic society

Note. From "White Racial Identity Models: A Critique and Alternative Proposal," by W. Rowe, S.K. Bennett, and D.R. Atkinson, 1994, *The Counseling Psychologist*, 22, p. 135. Copyright 1994 by the Division of Counseling Psychology. Adapted with permission of the author.

The stage at which an individual is currently may influence which cultural norms are most accepted. More specifically, an individual at the preencounter stage will identify most with the mainstream cultural ideal, whereas an individual at the other stages will tend to identify more with the ideal of his or her own ethnic group. For example, an adolescent in the preencounter stage will identify with the body ideal of the dominant white culture, whereas an adolescent in any of the other stages will tend to identify with the body size ideal of his or her own ethnic group.

### *Body Image/Body Ideal*

Another important developmental task during adolescence is integrating the new body image into a sense of self (Cobb, 1995). Body image is how one sees his or her own body (Berscheid, Walster, & Bohrnstedt, 1973). The translation of the physical body into the mental representation of the body and then into attitudes and behaviors toward the body is a complex and emotionally charged developmental process (Kearney-Cooke, 2002). Body image is a multifaceted construct that refers to the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about the body and bodily experience (Pruzinsky & Cash, 1990; Szymanski & Cash, 1995). There is both a cognitive and an emotional component to body image. Cognitive body image includes attentional body-focus and related self-statements, as well as beliefs about our bodies and bodily experience. Emotional body image includes our experiences of comfort or discomfort, satisfaction or dissatisfaction associated with our appearance. Body image is a highly subjective experience; therefore, the individual's subjective belief about his or her own body may not match the physical reality of the individual's body.

The development of body image is based on interactions with our primary caretakers, peers, and other individuals, which combine to provide an overall social influence (Pruzinsky & Cash, 1990). The social influences on body image may continue throughout a person's life. Stereotypes about the female body image appear to be interpreted and integrated in a very strict way by most adolescents (Ferron, 1997). A person's ideal body image may be influenced by the society and culture with which the individual identifies. It is important to establish the specific influences on women's ideal body size. The importance lies in the effects of a discrepancy between actual and ideal

body size. Body dissatisfaction, the result of an incongruent ideal and actual body size, can lead to depression, eating disorders, low self-esteem, anxiety, insecurity, and various other problems (Clifford, 1971; Joiner & Kashubeck, 1996; Kostanski & Gullone, 1998; Robinson, Killen, Litt, Hammer, Wilson, Haydel, Hayward, & Taylor, 1996; Syzmanski & Cash, 1995).

One major study on socio-cultural influences on body image was done by Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, and Ahrens (1992). They investigated current American society's depiction of the ideal female body as compared to a previous study examining ideal body size during 1959-1978. Using Miss America contestants and Playboy centerfolds, they found that body size for Miss America contestants decreased between 1979-1988, while Playboy centerfolds remained at a low level of body weight. During this time period, the majority of Playboy centerfolds and Miss American contestants had weights 15% or more below the expected weight for their age and height. Most importantly, their study found that the cultural ideal for mainstream American women's body size has remained thin and may perhaps become even thinner.

Fallon and Rozin (1985) explored the influences on men and women's ideal body size. The researchers presented a continuum of nine figures ranging from emaciated to obese. From this continuum, subjects were to choose four figures. The first figure chosen was their perceived current body size. The second was what the subject perceived as the ideal figure. Then each subject chose what he or she saw as the most attractive figure. Finally, they chose the figure that they assumed the opposite sex would perceive as attractive. Fallon and Rozin (1985) found support for the perceived social pressure women feel to become thinner. However, the investigators also found a discrepancy

between the women's ideal body and what men see as attractive. The ideal that the women chose was actually thinner than what the men chose as attractive. Fallon and Rozin argued that social factors are not the only ideals that influence the pursuit of thinness; there are also internal factors, such as the person's own drive for thinness, that add to the pressure to be thin. However, one may argue that these "internal factors" are likely to be internalized social influences. There is also the possibility that it may not be men who the women use a reference point, but other women instead.

It is assumed that different cultures identify with different body image ideals. Several studies have explored these cultural and ethnic differences (Collins, 1991; Flynn & Fitzgibbon, 1996; Gardner, Friedman, & Jackson, 1999; Lerner & Pool, 1972; Lopez, Blix, & Blix, 1995; Toriola & Igbokwe, 1985). Earlier studies focused on body-build stereotypes (Lerner & Pool, 1972; Toriola & Igbokwe, 1985). Instead of having people identify the ideal body size along a continuum, the ideal was chosen from one of three body types: mesomorph, endomorph, and ectomorph. The mesomorph body type was the more muscular type. Endomorph was the body type that was more like the obese figures in the continuum. Finally, the ectomorph body type was skinny and more toward the emaciated end of the continuum.

Lerner and Pool (1972) explored cultural differences in body type preference. The researchers studied children in a small Mexican town to see if the general parameters of body-build stereotypes obtained within American culture generalize across national and cultural boundaries. Interestingly, their results were consistent with those found in previous studies of body-build stereotypes; the mesomorph was the favored body type and the endomorph was the least favored. However, they also found that positive traits

were less often attributed to the mesomorph, and the endomorph was more accepted in the Mexican culture.

Body image ideals of low-income African American mothers and daughters were examined in a study by Flynn and Fitzgibbon (1996). Nearly 49% of all African American women in the United States are obese, as compared to 33% of all white women. Obesity is also more prevalent among people of lower socioeconomic statuses. During childhood, African American females are no more likely to be obese than nonminority females. The weight discrepancy between these two groups is not apparent until adolescence. Therefore, it is suggested that cultural factors contribute to this difference. Typically it is parents who introduce cultural norms and values. The researchers found that the ideal body sizes chosen were within normal weight range, as opposed to the findings of many studies done on white women. Their results suggest that low-income, nonobese African American females often idealize body sizes that are heavier than their current nonobese weights. Nearly 25% of the nonobese girls in the study said they wanted to gain weight. The mothers displayed an acceptance of obesity, which suggests that heavier body weights are culturally valued. One inference from these results is that the mothers perceive the heavier body size as healthier. Therefore, if low-income African American mothers equate heavy weights with health they may be less likely to encourage their daughters to eat a balanced diet and to exercise regularly.

Collins (1991) examined body figure perceptions and preferences among 1118 preadolescent children (average age was 7.97 years). The sample included boys and girls that were either African American or Anglo American. When the discrepancy between perception of self and ideal self was examined, only gender differences were significant,

with females preferring significantly thinner figures than males. When ethnic differences on ideal self were examined, African Americans selected significantly heavier figures than Anglo Americans, indicating, that even at this early age there are differences between African American and Anglo American children in the choice of ideal self.

Gardner et al. (1999) studied the perceived and ideal body size of 189 Hispanic and white children. They did not find ethnic group differences in either perceived or ideal body size. This finding contradicts findings from previously discussed studies (Flynn & Fitzgibbon, 1996; Lerner & Pool, 1972; Toriola & Igbokwe, 1985). However, this study was done on children ages 7, 10, or 13. What these findings suggest is that something may occur between childhood and adolescence for Hispanic and white children that contributes to differences in ideal body size. Flynn and Fitzgibbon's (1996) findings also suggest a shift at adolescence for African Americans as well.

Despite Gardner et al.'s (1999) findings, other researchers found ethnic differences when comparing both African Americans to Anglo Americans (Collins, 1991; Flynn and Fitzgibbon, 1996), and Latinas to Anglo Americans (Lerner and Pool, 1972). However, in these studies ethnicity was defined as ethnic group membership, and not the extent to which one identifies with that group. Lopez, Blix, and Blix (1995) examined the differences between Latinas and Anglo Americans in the United States. They confirmed that there were differences in the ideal body image between non-Latina white women and Latinas. Latinas, as a group, identified with a larger ideal body size than the non-Latina white women. However, the researchers found the dominant culture appeared to influence the body size ideal. While length of time in the U.S. was not significantly associated with ideal body image, age of introduction into U.S. society was found to be



an important factor. Those women who immigrated after the age of 16 differed the most from the ideal body image of non-Latina white women. The findings of this research appear to support the previous claim that the stage of ethnic identity at which the individual is currently influences which body ideal will be accepted, that of the mainstream culture or the ideal of her own ethnic group.

#### *Statement of the Problem & Purpose of the Study*

Social identity theory would suggest that body ideal would be different according to group identification (Negy, Shreve, Jensen, & Uddin, 2003). Ethnic differences have in fact been found in several studies; but they have been shown based on ethnic group membership, not ethnic identification. The specific relationship of ethnic identity and body ideal for Mexican American, African American, and Anglo American adolescent females has not been clearly defined; Lopez, Blix, and Blix (1995) have hinted at the role of ethnic identification (through the assessment of acculturation) in the choice of body ideal. Ethnic identity is only an indirect measure of culture; however, the evaluation of impact of ethnic identity is a critical step in establishing that cultural variables influence an individual's ideal body size.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether ethnic identity influences African American, Mexican American, and Anglo American adolescent girls' choice of ideal body size.

*Hypotheses*

1. It is expected that there will be differences among the three ethnic identity groups on the self body ideal chosen.
2. It is hypothesized that the more an Anglo American girl identifies with the Anglo American ethnic group, the smaller the self body ideal.
3. It is expected that the more a Mexican American or African American girl identifies with the Mexican American or African American ethnic group, the larger the self body ideal.
4. Finally, it is also expected that, across all groups, the lower the level of identification with the girl's own ethnic group, the higher the discrepancy will be between her own body ideal and her perception of her cultural ideal.

## Method

### *Participants*

Three hundred and thirty-five questionnaire packets were distributed to female students in either the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade in two public high schools, one private school, and one charity group. In order to be included in the study, students must have self-identified as being Mexican American, African American, or Anglo American, be English-speaking, and have parents who were English-speaking in order to complete research consents. A total of 43 students completed and returned the study questionnaire; however, 9 of those students were of mixed ethnicity and did not specify identity with one ethnic group. Therefore, 34 students' data were included, achieving a 10.1% response rate. Among the ethnic groups, most of the respondents were Anglo American (58.8%), most were Anglo American juniors in high school (41.2%), and most were Anglo American 16- or 17-year-olds (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Frequency information regarding demographic variables*

	African American		Mexican American		Anglo American	
	#	Percentage	#	Percentage	#	Percentage
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	2	5.9%	12	35.3%	20	58.8%
<b>Age</b>						
16-years-old	2	5.9%	4	11.8%	8	23.5%
17-years-old	0	0.0%	5	14.7%	8	23.5%
18-years-old	0	0.0%	3	8.9%	4	11.8%
<b>Grade Level</b>						
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade (Junior)	2	5.9%	5	14.7%	14	41.2%
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade (Senior)	0	0.0%	7	20.6%	6	17.7%

The demographics of the schools that were sampled are as follows. The first public high school to be sampled for the study was 70% Hispanic, 6% White, and 4% African American at the time of data collection. One hundred and thirty packets were distributed to this school, only 11 were returned. Of those 11 packets returned, four were Mexican American, one was Anglo American, and one was African American. At the time of data collection, the private school was 37% Hispanic, 32% Anglo American, and 12% African American. Fifty packets were distributed to this school and 10 were returned. Of those returned, seven were Mexican American and two were Anglo American. The charity group sampled consisted of primarily Anglo American girls. Thirty packets were distributed to this group, and 16 were returned. Of those returned 14 were Anglo American. Finally, the second public high school to be sampled was 52% Anglo American, 31% Hispanic, and 8% African American at the time of data collection. One hundred and fifteen packets were distributed to this school and six were returned. Of those returned, one was Mexican American, three were Anglo American, and one was African American.

### *Measures*

*Consent and assent forms.* A parental consent and student assent form was included in all packets distributed to interested students (see Appendices A and B).

*Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM).* The original version of the MEIM consisted of 14 items (Phinney, 1992). The present study used the recently revised version of the MEIM (Roberts et al, 1999; see Appendix C). This version of the MEIM consists of 12 items that assess overall ethnic identity, as well as two factors of ethnic identity. These two factors are: ethnic identity search (a developmental and cognitive

component that assesses achieved identity [7 items]); and affirmation, belonging, and commitment (an affective component that assesses attachment, pride, and good feelings about the person's ethnicity [5 items]). The items are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" (4) to "strongly disagree" (1). Ethnic identity is derived by summing across items and obtaining the overall mean. Thus, the scores range from 1 to 4. The higher the score, the more that individual identifies with the ethnicity that she previously indicated on the measure. Only overall ethnic identity will be used in this study. The questionnaire also includes additional items, not part of the score, which assess self-identification and ethnicity of parents. The MEIM has been shown to have sufficient reliability and construct validity for high school students. According to Roberts et al. (1999), the revised version of the MEIM has an overall Cronbach's alpha of .85. Recent research using the MEIM, both the first and the revised edition, has shown that this measure does indicate the strength of identification with one's own ethnic group (Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999; Smith & Brookins, 1997).

*Ideal Body Size Rating Scale.* Ideal body size was measured by the Figure Rating Scale adapted from Stunkard et al. (1983; see Appendix D). This scale consists of two parts: nine figure drawings of females, and nine figure drawings of males. Only the female drawings were used in this study. The drawings range from underweight (figure 1) to overweight (figure 9). From these drawings, participants were first asked to pick their own ideal ("What is your ideal body size?"). The self ideal body size scores range from 1-9. Then, to assess the cultural ideal, the participants were asked the following question: "Based on the ethnic group that you identified on the previous questionnaire, what is the ideal body size for that ethnic group among girls your age?" The cultural ideal body size

scores range from 1-9. A self vs. cultural ideal body size discrepancy was derived by subtracting the self body ideal score from the cultural body ideal score. The discrepancy scores range from -8 to +8. The absolute value of the discrepancy will be used for the statistical analyses. The Figure Rating Scale has been shown to have sufficient reliability and construct validity. According to Thompson (1996) test-retest reliability coefficients for own-ideal, the reliability is .82 for males, and .71 for females. Studies using the Figure Rating Scale have found that this measure can be accurately used to identify own ideal body size and cultural ideal body size (Altabe, 1998; Fallon & Rozin, 1985).

### *Procedure*

The three schools were selected after contacting several School District Superintendent offices. The administrators at these three schools volunteered to have their students be asked to participate by the graduate student researcher. The students were contacted initially in the classrooms of those teachers who agreed to participate. Several community groups were contacted; the charity group volunteered time for the graduate student researcher to present the study and solicit volunteers. All interested students were given a packet containing a parent consent and student assent form, the two questionnaires, drawing ticket and pre-stamped pre-addressed return envelope.

A packet was given to all interested students during class (or group meeting) after a brief description of the procedures was verbally given. Included in this packet were two copies of a parent consent form, two copies of a student assent form, ethnic identity questionnaire, body ideal questionnaire, drawing ticket, an envelope for the consent/assent forms and drawing ticket, and a larger pre-addressed pre-stamped envelope. As an incentive for participating in this study, students were provided a

drawing ticket to enter into a drawing for one of five pairs of movie tickets. Students wishing to participate in this study were asked to return the consent/assent forms, both questionnaires, and drawing ticket in the pre-addressed pre-stamped envelopes to the graduate student investigator. The identifying information included in the parent consent, student assent, and drawing card was kept separate from the questionnaires by having the student place these items in a separate, sealed envelope within the larger envelope. When the packets were received, the materials were examined for completion of parental consent and student assent. The questionnaires were then separated from the other information and coded and scored by the graduate student investigator. All forms were returned within one month of distribution at each school or meeting. The prize drawing was held on July 20, 2004 and the winners were notified through the mail.

## Results

This study examined the relationship between ethnic identity and ideal body size. It was expected that there would be differences among the Mexican American, African American, and Anglo American adolescent girls ethnic groups on their self body ideal chosen. It was also expected that the more an Anglo American girl identifies with the Anglo American ethnic group, the smaller their self body ideal. Thirdly, it was expected that the more a Mexican American or African American girl identifies with the Mexican American or African American ethnic group, the larger their own body ideal. Finally, it was expected that across all groups, the lower the level of identification with the girl's own ethnic group, the larger the discrepancy would be between her own body ideal and her perception of her cultural ideal. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS.

### *Statistical Assumptions*

Prior to performing the statistical analyses, the data was screened to assess whether it met the prerequisite assumptions associated with univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Pearson product-moment correlational analyses.

To assess for possible outliers, boxplots were created for each variable. There were no outliers present for ethnic identity, self body ideal, cultural body ideal, and self-cultural body ideal discrepancy.

To assess whether the assumption of normality had been met, a series of histograms and boxplots were created. In general, the histograms illustrated that ethnic identity was fairly normally distributed. Self body ideal was slightly negatively skewed, and appeared to be bimodal. When the data was reexamined, the bimodality appeared to be due to three of the participants indicating midpoints between figures (e.g., 2.5, 3.5),



while most of the sample chose the actual figures (e.g., 2, 3, 4). Due to the small sample size the midpoints were used rather than throwing out the responses. Overall, self body ideal appears to be close enough to being normally distributed to perform the analyses. The histograms of cultural ideal body size and self-cultural ideal body size discrepancy appeared to be fairly normally distributed.

Standard deviations and box plots were examined to assess for homogeneity of variance among the ethnic groups. The Mexican American and Anglo American groups had very similar variance on ethnic identity, self-ideal body size, cultural body ideal size, and self-cultural body size discrepancy; however, the African American group greatly differed on all dependent variables, most likely because there were only two participants in that group. Due to this difference, the analyses will be performed with and without the African American group to determine the impact, or lack there of, on the results.

### *Initial Analyses*

As previously shown in Table 2, the majority of the respondents were 16-years-old. Univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed to determine if there was a significant difference among groups for age to rule out the possibility of a covariate. The ethnic groups did not differ significantly by age ( $M_{\text{African American}} = 16.0$ ;  $M_{\text{Mexican American}} = 16.92$ ;  $M_{\text{Anglo American}} = 16.80$ ;  $F[2, 33] = 1.234$ ,  $p = .305$ ).

Descriptive statistics were also completed for the dependent variables across all three groups and within each ethnic group (see Table 3). The mean ethnic identity score across all ethnic groups of 2.93 ( $SD = .64$ ) indicates an overall higher level of ethnic identification. The Mexican American ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) and African American ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = .06$ ) girls showed a higher level of ethnic identity than the Anglo American

girls ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = .35$ ). However, the groups did not differ significantly by level of ethnic identity (see Figure 1;  $F[2,33] = 1.410$ ,  $p = .259$ ). The mean ideal body size across groups of 3.25 ( $SD = .37$ ) indicates participants chose a relatively thin ideal body size. Anglo American girls chose a slightly larger ideal body size than the other ethnic groups ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) while African American girls chose a slightly smaller ideal body size than the other ethnic groups ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = .00$ ).

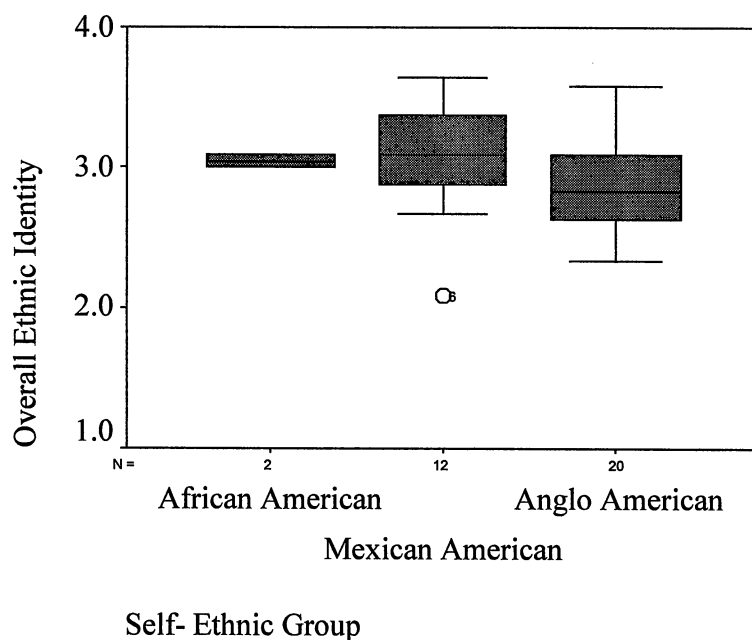


Figure 1. The groups did not differ significantly on overall ethnic identity.

Table 3

*Descriptive statistics for the dependent variables*

Variable	All Groups			African American			Mexican American			Anglo American			Differences
	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range	
Overall Ethnic Identity	2.93	.64	2.08-3.64	3.04	.06	3.00-3.08	3.06	.42	2.08-3.64	2.84	.35	2.33-3.58	.259
Self Ideal	3.25	.37	2.00-4.00	3.00	.00	3.00-3.00	3.21	.72	2.00-4.00	3.30	.64	2.00-4.00	.799
Cultural Ideal	3.56	.94	2.00-6.00	4.25	.35	4.00-4.50	4.17	1.05	2.00-6.00	3.13	.65	2.00-4.00	.003
Cultural-Self Ideal	10.31	1.01	9.00-12.00	11.25	.35	11.00-11.50	10.96	1.05	9.00-12.00	9.83	.71	9.00-11.00	.001

Note. Ranges: Overall Ethnic Identity (1.00-4.00); Self Ideal (1.00-9.00); Cultural Ideal (1.00-9.00); Self-Cultural Ideal Discrepancy (2.00-18.00).

Significance: \* < .05

### *Hypotheses*

*Hypothesis 1.* To test the hypothesis that there are differences among the three ethnic groups on the body ideal chosen a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed including the African American group. There was not a significant difference among the groups on the ideal body size chosen ( $M_{\text{African American}} = 3.0$ ;  $M_{\text{Mexican American}} = 3.2$ ;  $M_{\text{Anglo American}} = 3.3$ ;  $F[2, 33] = .226, p = .799$ ). A second ANOVA was performed excluding the African American group. No significant differences emerged between the remaining groups on ideal body size chosen ( $M_{\text{Mexican American}} = 3.2$ ;  $M_{\text{Anglo American}} = 3.3$ ;  $F[1, 31] = .141, p = .710$ ).

*Hypothesis 2.* To test the hypothesis that the more an Anglo American girl identifies with the Anglo American ethnic group, the smaller the self body ideal, a Pearson product-moment correlation was completed within the group of Anglo American girls. A negative correlation was expected. There was a negative correlation; however, it was not significant ( $r[20] = -.152, p = .262$ ). Given the small sample size it is important to examine the effect size of this correlation. The effect size is very small ( $r^2 = .023$ ) and accounts for only 2% of the variance.

*Hypothesis 3.* To test the hypothesis that the more a Mexican American or African American girl identifies with her respective Mexican American or African American ethnic group, the larger the self body ideal, a Pearson product-moment correlation was performed across these two ethnic groups. When the two African American participants were included there was a positive correlation; however, it was not significant ( $r[14] = .282, p = .164$ ). The effect size for this correlation is small ( $r^2 = .080$ ) and accounts for only 8% of the variance. When the two African American participants were excluded

there was still a positive correlation; however, it was also not significant ( $r[12] = .283, p = .187$ ) and had a small effect size ( $r^2 = .080$ ).

*Hypothesis 4.* To test the hypothesis that, across all groups, the lower the level of identification with the girl's own ethnic group, the larger the discrepancy will be between her own body ideal and her perception of her cultural ideal a Pearson product-moment correlation was performed using a transformed value of the discrepancy. The original discrepancy score was transformed by adding a value of 10 to all scores to allow for a complete range when the original value is negative. Including the African American group in the analysis, there was a positive correlation; however, it was not significant ( $r[34] = .173, p = .164$ ). Excluding the African American group there was still a positive correlation; however, it was also not significant ( $r[32] = .159, p = .193$ ).

*Exploratory analyses.* Given that ethnic group differences were not found on self body ideal, further analyses were completed to explore differences in cultural ideal among the three groups and the differences between self body ideal and cultural body ideal, as well as the difference in the self-cultural body ideal discrepancy among the three groups. The relationship between ethnic identity and cultural body ideal was also explored.

Due to an apparent difference among groups on the cultural ideal chosen (see Table 3), a univariate analysis of variance was conducted to determine if this difference was significant. There was a significant difference among groups on cultural ideal body size chosen ( $M_{\text{African American}} = 4.25$ ;  $M_{\text{Mexican American}} = 4.17$ ;  $M_{\text{Anglo American}} = 3.13$ ;  $F[2,33] = 7.013, p = .003$ ). A post hoc test (Games-Howell pairwise comparison test) was run to examine this difference. This test was chosen because there are unequal variances. The

Mexican American group was significantly different from the Anglo American group ( $p = .018$ ).

To explore the differences between the self body ideal and cultural body ideal, a within groups  $t$ -test was completed for the Mexican American group and the Anglo American group. A  $t$ -test could not be completed for the African American group because the standard deviation for self body ideal was zero. The self body ideal ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) of the Mexican American girls was significantly smaller than their cultural body ideal ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ;  $t [11] = -3.149$ ,  $p = .009$ ). For the Anglo American girls, the self body ideal ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) was similar to the cultural body ideal ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = .65$ ) and therefore not significantly different,  $t (19) = 1.099$ ,  $p = .286$ .

When the groups were examined on self-cultural body ideal discrepancy a significant difference, using a transformed value of the discrepancy, was found ( $M_{\text{African American}} = 11.25$ ;  $M_{\text{Mexican American}} = 10.96$ ;  $M_{\text{Anglo American}} = 9.83$ ;  $F[2,33] = 8.116$ ,  $p = .001$ ). A post hoc test (Games-Howell pairwise comparison test) was run to examine this difference. This test was chosen because there are unequal variances. The Mexican American group was significantly different from the Anglo American group ( $p = .011$ ).

To examine the relationship between ethnic identity and cultural ideal, Pearson product-moment correlations were completed for the Mexican American and the Anglo American girls. There was a positive correlation between ethnic identity and cultural ideal for the Mexican American girls; however, it was not significant ( $r [12] = .343$ ,  $p = .138$ ). The effect size was small ( $r^2 = .118$ ) and accounts for about 12% of the variance. There was a negative correlation between ethnic identity and cultural ideal for the Anglo

American girls, however, it was not significant ( $r[20] = -.310, p = .092$ ). The effect size was small ( $r^2 = .096$ ) and accounts for about 10% of the variance.

Finally, the analyses for hypothesis 4 were rerun separating the Mexican American and African American girls from the Anglo American girls. The Pearson product-moment correlation produced a positive correlation between ethnic identity and the self-cultural body ideal discrepancy for the Mexican American and African American girls; however, it was not significant ( $r[14] = .149, p = .305$ ). For the Anglo American girls, there was a negative correlation between ethnic identity and the self-cultural ideal discrepancy that was not significant ( $r[20] = -.145, p = .270$ ).

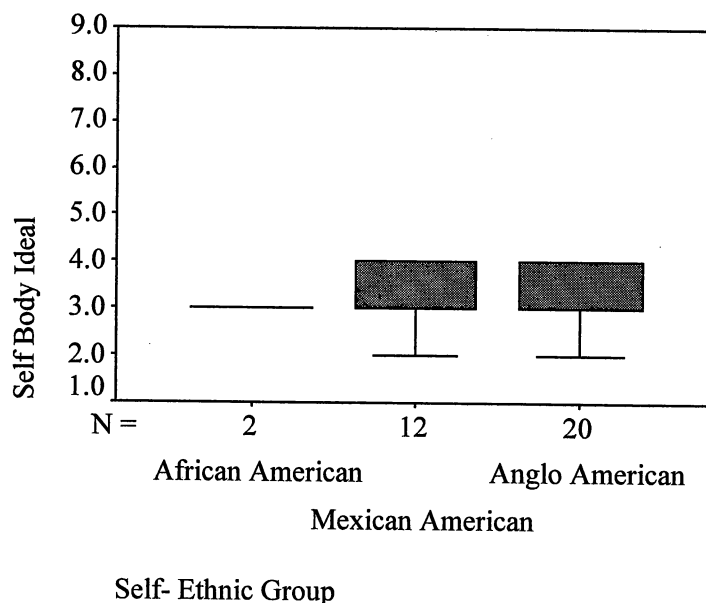
## Discussion

The overall goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of ethnic differences in ideal body size for adolescent Mexican American, African American, and Anglo American females. It sought to go a step beyond the previously examined differences based on ethnic group membership by including ethnic identity to determine if there is a relationship between degree of identity with a person's ethnic group and the ideal body size that the person chooses.

### *Hypotheses*

The first hypothesis, based on previous findings within the literature (i.e., Collins, 1991; Flynn & Fitzgibbon, 1996; Gardner, Friedman, & Jackson, 1999; Lerner & Pool, 1972; Lopez, Blix, & Blix, 1995; Toriola & Igbokwe, 1985), expected that there would be differences among the three ethnic groups on self ideal body size. There were no significant differences among the African American, Mexican American, and Anglo American adolescent females within this sample (see Figure 2). Interestingly, the mean ideal body size for each group was opposite than what would be expected with African American adolescent females choosing the smallest ideal body size ( $M = 3.0$ ) and Anglo American adolescent females choosing the slightly larger ideal body size ( $M = 3.3$ ), with Mexican American females in between the other groups ( $M = 3.2$ ). Also, interesting is that all three groups chose a mean size that was in the lowest third of the figures, indicating an overall preference for thinness.





*Figure 2.* No significant differences among groups on self body ideal chosen.

While differences among ethnic groups have been explored, it is interesting to note that a significant minority of African American and Hispanic adolescent girls wants to be thinner, in part because these girls are prone to high rates of obesity while coping with a dominant white culture that idealizes thinness as one form of feminine achievement (Levine & Smolak, 2002). This may indicate the beginning of change in self ideal body size for these ethnic groups as a growing awareness develops in relation to weight and health. While these ethnic groups appear to acknowledge heavier cultural ideals, it may be that differences between ethnic groups on self ideal body size may begin to diminish. For this sample, it is important to note that the three schools from which data was collected are very ethnically diverse, and do not have a large Anglo American population that may be present in many schools. Indicating that there is more of an opportunity to be surrounded by members of their ethnic group.

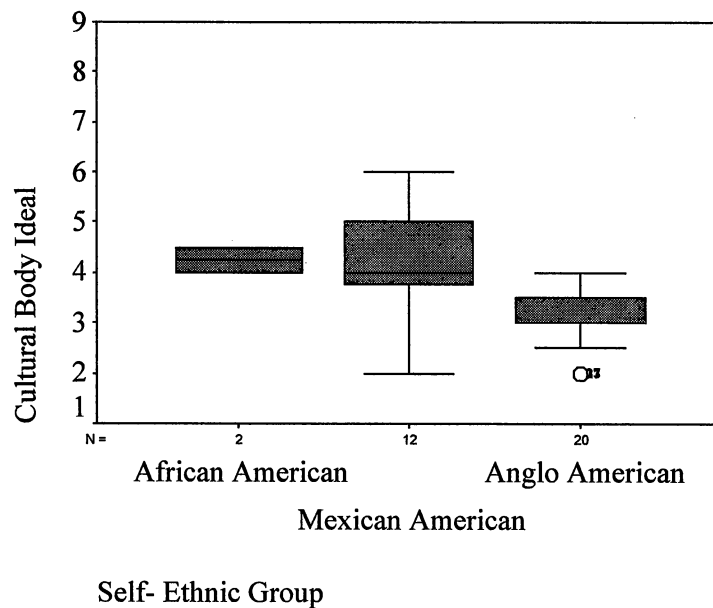
The second hypothesis focused on the Anglo American participants, expecting that there would be a negative correlation between ethnic identity and self ideal body size. Specifically, the expectation was that as the degree of identification with Anglo American culture increased, the self ideal body size would decrease. The results did show a negative correlation; however, it was not significant and had a very small effect size, accounting for only 2% of the variance. An exploratory analysis of the relationship between ethnic identity and cultural ideal body produced a negative correlation that was not significant and had a small effect size, accounting for about 10% of the variance.

The third hypothesis proposed that within the combined group of African American and Mexican American females, self ideal body size would be positively correlated with ethnic identity. More specifically, it was expected that as African American and Mexican American are more identified with their ethnic group, their self ideal body size would be larger. There was a positive correlation both with and without the African American participants; however, it was not significant, and had a small effect size, accounting for only 8% of the variance. A positive correlation would suggest that a stronger identification with these ethnic groups would act as a buffer to the majority culture's emphasis on a thinner ideal. An exploratory analysis of the relationship between ethnic identity and cultural body ideal for the Mexican American girls produced a positive correlation that was not significant, and had a small effect size, accounting for about 12% of the variance.

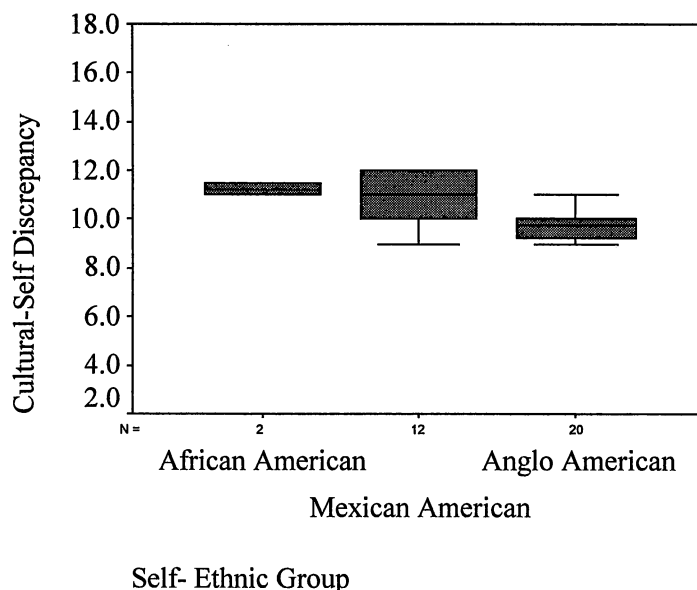
Finally, it was expected that across all groups, ethnic group identification scores would be negatively correlated with ideal body size discrepancy (self-cultural ideal) scores, indicating that the less a person identifies with her ethnic group the larger the

discrepancy between her ideal body size and her perception of the ideal body size of her ethnic group. Contrary to expectations, there was a positive correlation when analyses both included and excluded the African American participants. This correlation was also not significant.

While this hypothesis was not supported, it is interesting to examine the exploratory analyses conducted on cultural ideal (see Figure 3) and the self-cultural ideal discrepancy (see Figure 4). Both analyses demonstrated a significant difference between the Anglo American girls and the Mexican American girls.



*Figure 3.* There is a significant difference between the Mexican American girls and the Anglo American girls on their perception of their respective cultural body ideals.



*Figure 4.* There is a significant difference between the Mexican American girls and the Anglo American girls on the discrepancy between their self body ideal and cultural body ideal.

The Anglo American girls chose a significantly smaller cultural body ideal and they had the smallest mean discrepancy between self body ideal and cultural body ideal, indicating that they acknowledge an unattainable society body ideal. The Mexican American participants displayed the largest range in perceived cultural body ideal, while the Anglo American participants chose more similar perceived cultural body ideals within their group.

Further exploratory analyses showed that the self body ideal of the Mexican American girls was significantly smaller than their cultural ideal body size; whereas the Anglo American girls' self body ideal was very similar to, and not significantly different from, their cultural body ideal. This finding suggests that only the Anglo American girls appear to internalize their cultural body ideal, whereas the Mexican American girls appear to be internalizing a cultural ideal different from their ethnic culture.

A final exploratory analysis was completed on the relationship between ethnic identity and the self-cultural body ideal discrepancy for African American girls and Mexican American girls, and then for the Anglo American girls. There was a positive correlation between ethnic identity and the self-cultural body ideal discrepancy for the Mexican American and African American girls; however, it was not significant. The positive correlation was contrary to the expected negative correlation, indicating that the more they identified with their culture, the larger the discrepancy between self body ideal and cultural body ideal. This provides more evidence in support of the conflict for these groups between the perceived body ideal of their culture and their ideal; while they may identify with their cultural, they do not identify with this aspect. For the Anglo American girls, there was a negative correlation between ethnic identity and the self-cultural ideal discrepancy that was not significant. Interestingly, the Anglo American girls were the only group with the expected negative correlation.

While the hypotheses of this study were not supported by the data, there were some interesting findings. One of the more prominent findings is that despite a relatively strong ethnic identity, the Mexican American and African American girls do not appear to be internalizing that aspect of their culture. They appear to be internalizing another cultural ideal, possibly the more pervasive high school cultural ideal of thinness for girls. It is also interesting that while there was not a significant difference between self body ideal among the groups, there was a significant difference between cultural ideals among groups. The African American and Mexican American girls appear to acknowledge the preference for a larger body ideal within their culture, while simultaneously not prescribing to it as demonstrated by their significantly thinner self body ideal.

There are several possibilities as to why the results were not as expected. One reason may be that adolescent girls are more affected by the larger society's ideal adolescent girl rather than the ethnic body ideal, as suggested by the findings of the exploratory analyses. It may be that the societal ideal is more salient than the individual ethnic/cultural ideal. In the United States and other patriarchal, industrialized cultures, the attributes that characterize the ideal of feminine beauty are: white, young, tall, firm but not too muscular, and somehow both slender and full-breasted (Levine & Smolak, 2002). According to Levine and Smolak (2002), in cultures as diverse as the Ukraine and Fiji, mass media is associated with internalization of the slender beauty ideal. Many adolescent girls compare themselves to the slender, glamorous women in magazines and on TV. According to Tantleff-Dunn and Gokee (2002), studies have found that girls more often than boys believe that thinness increases likeability, and the extent to which this belief is held predicts weight and body image concerns. In addition, Celio, Zabinski, and Wilfley (2002) report that ethnic identity may play a role in body image satisfaction but that other personal characteristics such as body mass index and social influences, are more significant contributors.

Other variables that may have impacted the results include physical maturity of the participants that responded. There may have been an interaction between those participants that matured earlier than their peers, regardless of ethnicity. It may be that they have not adjusted to have very different body types than their peers, and therefore desire to be more like those peers by having a smaller ideal body size.

Another possible variable that may have impacted the ideal body size chosen, as well as the ethnic identity, is the ethnic make-up of the school environment. All three

schools had large Hispanic and Anglo American populations. In fact one public school had a significantly larger Hispanic population than other ethnicities. In the other schools the Hispanic and Anglo American populations were similar in size. All three schools had relatively small African American populations. Therefore, it is likely that the African American students in these schools are more impacted by other ideals than those of their ethnic group. This may explain why the African American participants had a smaller mean ideal body size.

A variable that was not examined in this study that may have impacted the results, especially for the Mexican American respondents, is immigrant status. This study did not compare those Mexican American participants that were born in the United States with those that may have immigrated later. However, Lopez, Blix, and Blix (1995) found that length of time in the United States was not significantly associated with ideal body image. They did find that age of introduction to the United States was an important factor, but only for those that immigrated after age 16. It is likely that those that did immigrate sometime during high school were excluded by the criteria that they and their parents had to be able to read and understand English to complete the questionnaires.

Another reason that the hypotheses may not have been supported is that the instruments themselves may not have clear. Ethnic identity may need to be examined through a narrative rather than a stage-based questionnaire (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). A narrative would use social contexts such as culture, history, and linguistic conventions. The narrative would take into account all the relevant information from the person's life. A person's ethnic identity would be examined based on the congruence and consistency within the narrative.

### *Study Limitations*

An obvious limitation in this research is the small sample size of the study. This study only had a 10.1% response rate. There are several possible explanations for this low response rate. One is that the surveys could not be completed at school; they had to be completed at home, after their parents signed the consent form, and then mailed back to the student researcher. Additionally, the parents had to be able to read and understand English to sign the letter. This may have limited the response from the Mexican American population. Further, many of the participants were approached toward the end of the school year and were therefore also possibly distracted by many of the end of the year events in high school. Another possible explanation for the low response rate was that there was no personal follow-up with the participants to encourage them to return the surveys. The schools only allowed for one day of questionnaire distribution. Many of the teachers expressed that they would follow through with the questionnaires, but it is not known whether this occurred. The only group that allowed for a follow-up was the charity group.

### *Implications*

While the results were not significant, there are some implications of the findings. As indicated previously, the lack of significant differences in self ideal body size and among the ethnic groups may be due to the pervasiveness of the majority white culture. It is important to establish that there may be less difference among ethnic groups than in previous years. Therefore, instead of separating adolescent girls according to ethnic groups in terms of body image concerns, it may be more important to address the societal ideal of thinness. It may be more important to address interpersonal and familial aspects



of body image, rather than, or in addition to, ethnic contributors to body image. Tantleff-Dunn and Gokee (2002) posit that social comparison theory guides body image development. Social comparison theory suggests that the tendency to compare one's physical appearance to others moderates the extent to which the pervasive representation of the thin, attractive ideal results in body image disturbance. In accordance with this theory, targets of comparison should be important variables in determining how people feel about themselves; girls in high school tend to compare themselves to "the popular girls." Targets of comparison are hinted at in the Fallon and Rozin (1985) study. The importance in this theory is on interactions between people that facilitate these comparisons. Developmentally, the interactions that facilitate social comparison shift from parents to peers throughout childhood and adolescence. Young children may be most influenced by parents and their opinions about body size, whereas adolescents' body images may be more affected by interactions with peers and their peers' definition of ideal body size. Therefore, these comparisons may happen across ethnicities, especially when comparing self with peers, which is another reason ethnic identity may not be as strong a factor in body image development.

Another implication concerns health. One indication of the self and cultural body ideals chosen is that the girls from all three ethnic groups recognize a healthy body size. Celio et al. (2002) discuss the prevalence of obesity in African Americans. One thought is that larger body sizes are more acceptable; however, these body sizes are not necessarily healthy. The two African American participants in this study chose more average-size bodies in their choice of self and cultural ideals. Only three of the participants chose cultural ideals that were slightly larger than average, one being more obese. All three of

those participants were Mexican American, another culture that typically is more accepting of larger body sizes. In contrast to the heavier body sizes chosen are the very thin ideal body sizes chosen. Four of the participants (Mexican American and Anglo American) chose more emaciated self body ideals and 5 chose more emaciated cultural ideals. A large percentage (47%) of the participants chose very thin self ideal body sizes, whereas 26% of the participants chose that same body size as their cultural ideal. Among these participants that chose thinner body sizes, there were fairly equal numbers of Mexican American and Anglo American participants.

### *Future Research*

Within a larger culture that contains pervasive messages that physical attractiveness is important and where unrealistic images of thinness proliferate, further investigation is needed to explore why some individuals develop body image disturbances and others do not. If it is not due to factors of ethnic identity, what are the interpersonal factors that drive body size preference. Rather than the aspects of ethnic cultures, what factors within familial and peer subcultures convey appearance-related beliefs, values, and behaviors that serve either to buffer or propagate media influences and other sociocultural influences? Rather than being the primary factor in body image, is ethnicity or ethnic identity a mediator of the interpersonal influences?

Using these foundational questions, a follow-up study to the present research would be to examine the relative importance of the various subcultures that interact with, and may therefore impact, adolescents (e.g., parents, family, peers, community members). It would be interesting to explore the ethnicities that make up each group and the extent to which the adolescent values each group's opinions and views toward body

size. It would also be important to include the adolescent's perceptions of the body sizes that make up these various subcultures. An exploration of the various groups that may impact an adolescent's body ideals may lead to a deeper understanding of what factors lead to the development of ideal body size. Following this, it would also be important to see how the answers to these questions change from childhood through adolescence, especially considering studies such as Gardner et al. (1999) and Flynn and Fitzgibbon (1996) that suggest a shift at adolescence in ideal body size.

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## APPENDIX A

### Parental Consent Form

#### **Body Size Perceptions and Identity in Teenaged Girls**

Dear Parent:

Your daughter is invited to take part in a research study that will explore the ideal body sizes of teenaged girls and how these girls relate to their ethnic group.

If you and your daughter agree, she will be asked to fill out the two enclosed questionnaires. One questionnaire measures how much your daughter feels a part of her ethnic group, and the other her ideas about ideal body size. The questionnaires will take about 15 minutes to fill out.

Please have your daughter read the enclosed letter addressed to her. If she chooses to be included in this study, please sign this letter and have your daughter sign her letter and fill out the questionnaires. She is not to write her name on the questionnaires. If she agrees to fill out the questionnaires and return them, we will enter her in a drawing for a pair of movie tickets. In order to be included in the drawing, please have your daughter include her name and address on the back of the raffle ticket. Then put the parent and student letters, and the raffle ticket in the white envelope. Place the white envelope and the completed questionnaires in the addressed manila envelope and mail it. Please keep a copy of the two letters for your records.

When your daughter returns the questionnaires, her raffle ticket will be entered into a drawing for one of five pairs of movie tickets.

When they are received, the envelope with the raffle ticket and the letters will be immediately separated from the questionnaires so there will be no connection between your daughter's name and her responses on the questionnaires.

There is a minimal risk that your daughter may experience some emotional discomfort if the body size she desires differs from her actual body size.

Although your daughter will not benefit directly from this study, she may gain some understanding of her feelings toward her body and her ethnic group. A possible general benefit is that the study findings will help psychologists to further understand how culture affects young women's attitudes about their bodies.

Your daughter's involvement in this study is voluntary and she can decide to stop answering the questionnaires at any time. Whether or not she participates will not affect her standing at school in any way.

There is no cost to your daughter for being a part of this study.

If you wish to contact an impartial third party not associated with this study regarding any complaint you may have about this study, you may contact the Office of Patient Relations, Loma Linda University Medical Center, Loma Linda, CA 92354, phone (909) 558-4647 for information and assistance.

Once you have read the contents of this informational letter, please sign it. This agreement to participate does not waive your rights, nor does it release the investigators, institution, or sponsors from their responsibilities. You may call the graduate student investigator, Erin Ramirez, or the faculty advisor, Janet Sonne, Ph.D., at Loma Linda University, Department of Psychology during routine office hours at (909) 558-8710 if you have any additional questions or concerns. You will need to keep a copy of this letter.

Sincerely,

Janet Sonne, Ph.D.  
Research Supervisor

Erin Ramirez  
Graduate Student

---

Name of Daughter

---

Parent or Guardian Signature

---

Date

## APPENDIX B

### Student Assent Form

#### **Body Size Perceptions and Identity in Teenaged Girls**

Dear Student:

You are invited to take part in a research study that will explore the ideal body sizes of teenaged girls and how you relate to your ethnic group.

If you agree to participate, please sign this letter and fill out the two enclosed questionnaires. One questionnaire measures how much you feel a part of your ethnic group, and the other measures ideal body size. The questionnaires will take about 15 minutes to fill out. Please do not write your name on the questionnaires.

If you agree to fill out the questionnaires and return them, we will enter you in a drawing for a pair of movie tickets. To be included in the drawing, please write your name and address on the back of the raffle ticket. Then put the parent and student letters, and the raffle ticket in the white envelope. Place the white envelope and the completed questionnaires in the addressed manila envelope and mail it. Please retain a keep of the two letters for your records.

A checklist is included to remind you of the steps you need to take to complete the letters and questionnaires.

When they are received, the envelope with the raffle ticket and the letters will be immediately separated from the questionnaires so there will be no connection between your name and your responses on the questionnaires.

There is a minimal risk that you may experience some emotional discomfort if the body size you desire differs from your actual body size.

Although you will not benefit directly from this study, you may gain some understanding of your feelings toward your body and your ethnic group. A possible general benefit is that the study findings will help psychologists to further understand how culture affects young women's attitudes about their bodies.

Your involvement in this study is voluntary and you can decide to stop answering the questionnaires at any time.

Once you have read the contents of this letter, please sign it. You may call the graduate student investigator, Erin Ramirez, or the faculty advisor, Janet Sonne, Ph.D., at Loma Linda University, Department of Psychology during routine office hours at (909) 558-8710 if you have any additional questions or concerns. You will need to keep a copy of this letter.

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

### **Checklist**

- Parent to read and sign parent letter
- Student to read and sign student letter
- Fill out raffle ticket with student's name and address
- Student fill out two questionnaires (do not put name on either questionnaire)
- Put signed parent letter and signed student letter and raffle ticket in white envelope.
- Put white envelope and two questionnaires in manila envelope and mail it

APPENDIX C

Ethnic Identity Questionnaire

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Native American or American Indian, Mexican American, and Caucasian or White. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be \_\_\_\_\_

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

**(4) Strongly agree    (3) Agree    (2) Disagree    (1) Strongly disagree**

1-I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs. \_\_\_\_\_

2-I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group. \_\_\_\_\_

3-I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me. \_\_\_\_\_

4-I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership. \_\_\_\_\_

5-I am happy that I am a member of the groups I belong to. \_\_\_\_\_

6-I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group. \_\_\_\_\_

7-I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me. \_\_\_\_\_

8-In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group. \_\_\_\_\_

9-I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group. \_\_\_\_\_

10-I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs. \_\_\_\_\_

11-I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

---

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12-I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

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13-My ethnicity is

- (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
- (2) Black or African American
- (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
- (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
- (5) American Indian/Native American
- (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
- (7) Other (write in): \_\_\_\_\_

---

14-My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

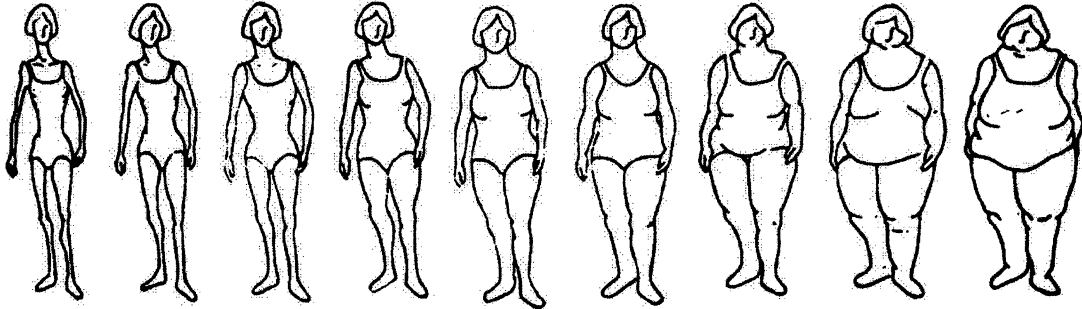
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15-My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

---

APPENDIX D

Body Ideal Questionnaire



Body Ideal Questions

1. What is your ideal body size (indicate number)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Based on the ethnic group that you identified on the previous questionnaire, what is the ideal body size for that ethnic group among girls your age (indicate number)? \_\_\_\_\_

Figures reprinted from Stunkard, A.J., Sorenson, T., & Schulsinger, F. Use of the Danish Adoption Register for the study of obesity and thinness. In: S.S. Kety, L.P. Rowland, R.L. Sidman, S.W. Matthysse (Eds.) The Genetics of Neurological and Psychiatric Disorders. New York: RavenPress, 1983, pp. 115-120.

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