

Racial Identity and Gender as Moderators of the Relationship Between Body Image and Self-esteem for African Americans

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Abstract This study explored whether multiple dimensions of racial identity and gender moderated the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for African American men and women ($N=425$) using an intersectional approach. Centrality (strength of identification with racial group), private regard (positive feelings about racial group), public regard (positive feelings others have about racial group), and gender moderated the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for a sample of men ($n=109$) and women ($n=316$) college students from three regions of the United States. Body dissatisfaction was related to lower self-esteem only for those African Americans for whom race was less central to their identities. High private regard and low body dissatisfaction were synergistically associated with higher self-esteem. Similarly, low public regard and high body dissatisfaction were synergistically related to lower self-esteem. There was a positive main effect for assimilation ideology (emphasis on similarities between African Americans and Western society) on self-esteem; however it was not a significant

moderator. The relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem was stronger for women than for men. This study extends our knowledge of the ways in which racial attitudes and gender shape how African Americans experience their bodies and are related to self-esteem.

Keywords Body satisfaction · Racial identity · Self-esteem · Gender · African Americans

Introduction

Given the importance placed on appearance, particularly for women, in Western culture (Wolf 2002), it is hardly surprising that self-esteem has been described as the most pivotal personality attribute related to body attitudes (Cash 2002). However, individuals derive self-esteem from different sources (Crocker et al. 2003). Members of visible ethnic and racial minorities, who face stigma and discrimination based on the physical markers of group membership and social devaluation of their phenotypes, are faced with the challenge of maintaining a healthy sense of self within a culture that views them as deviant from the body ideal. As a result, many members of visible ethnic and racial minority communities may develop particular attitudes about their bodies and their social groups to help buffer their self-esteem against this societal threat. Because members of racial and ethnic minority groups differ in their phenomenological experience of group membership, we would expect significant within group variation in their attitudes regarding their social group membership, satisfaction with their bodies, and personal self-esteem. Moreover, these associations may vary for men and women, based on the differential importance of appearance based on gender. This study uses survey methodology to explore these questions

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within a sample of African American college students from three regions of the United States.

Research conducted primarily with European American samples has generally found the relationship between body image and self-esteem to be stronger for women than men (Furnham 2002; Grossbard et al. 2009; Henriques and Calhoun 1999; Mintz and Betz 1986; Molloy and Herzberger 1998). These differences have been hypothesized to be related to women's gendered experiences of objectification (Fredrickson et al. 1998; Mercurio and Landry 2008; Wolf 2002). It is an open question as to whether the gender differences that have been found in European Americans exist among African Americans. It is also an open question as to how experiences of race and gender play a role in the relationship between self-esteem and body attitudes. An intersectional approach suggests that race and gender, and participants' thoughts and feelings about these categories, might moderate the relationship between self-esteem and body attitudes. This study explores these issues by examining the roles of racial identity attitudes and gender in moderating the relationship between self-esteem and body dissatisfaction in a sample of African American college men and women.

Self-esteem, African Americans, and Body Image

Self-esteem, the overall evaluation of a person's own self-worth (Rosenberg 1965), is an important concept in the study of African American psychology, especially as it is related to their stigmatized status within the United States (Twenge and Crocker 2002). For African Americans, self-esteem is inversely related to negative emotions and positively related to mental health, satisfaction with life, and coping with discrimination (Branscombe et al. 1999; Fischer and Shaw 1999; Utsey et al. 2000). Research has found that African Americans have higher self-esteem in comparison to other racial and ethnic groups, despite the negative ramifications of racism (Twenge and Crocker 2002). It has been theorized that through racial identity, membership in a stigmatized group affords African Americans insulation from the detrimental consequences of their stigmatized status (Twenge and Crocker 2002). The belief that race is a central part of one's identity (Twenge and Crocker 2002) and holding positive attitudes towards one's racial group (Rowley et al. 1998) has been associated with higher self-esteem among African Americans.

Research on the relationship between self-esteem and body attitudes for African Americans has focused primarily on the experience of women. Previous studies, both qualitative and quantitative in design, have found that self-esteem is positively related to African American women's body attitudes including fitness evaluation, feel-

ings about weight, and appearance attitudes (Akan and Grilo 1995; Lennon et al. 1999; Parker et al. 1995). The nature of the relationship between body attitudes and self-esteem may be complicated for African Americans due to the fact that they may have different body ideals than those common in Western society.

The body ideals for women within the African American community are light skin tone, long and straight or loosely curled hair, and a curvy body shape (Collins 2004; Hesse-Biber 2004; Okazawa-Rey et al. 1987; Stephens and Few 2007; Thompson 2006). Western ideals of appearance for women include white skin, long blond hair, and thinness (Collins 2004; Sypeck et al. 2004). Both African American men and women are affected by the preference for light skin; however, skin color is a stronger predictor of perceived attractiveness for women (Hill 2002; Neal 1989; Stephens and Few 2007). As a result, African American women may face specific appearance-related stressors because they can be affected by the sometimes incongruous standards from both the African American and Western cultures (Poran 2006). In contrast, the body standards for men in both the African American and Western cultures are more congruous and emphasize muscularity (Leit et al. 2001; Ricciardelli et al. 2007).

African American Racial Identity

Obviously, satisfaction with the body is not the only source of self-esteem available to individuals. If personal identity is tied to membership in a valued social group, individuals will also derive their self-esteem in part from that identification (Harter 2001; Sellers et al. 1998). For some African Americans, race may represent a valued social group. Sellers and colleagues developed the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) as a conceptual framework for understanding the structure and content of African Americans' attitudes and beliefs about: (a) the significance of race in their definition of self and (b) what they believe it means to be Black (Sellers et al. 1997, 1998).

The MMRI proposes multiple dimensions of racial identity including racial centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology. Racial centrality is the degree to which being an African American is central to a person's identity. Racial regard refers to a person's affective and evaluative judgment of their racial group membership. Racial regard includes both private regard, the extent to which individuals feel positively towards African Americans and their racial group membership, and public regard, the extent to which individuals believe others view African Americans positively. Finally, racial ideology refers to the individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes about how racial group members should behave and interact with society. Sellers et

al. (1998) identified four ideologies- assimilation, humanist, minority, and nationalist. For the purpose of the present study, we will focus only on the assimilation ideology. Individuals who endorse assimilation ideology emphasize similarities between African Americans and Western society, and thus may be related to endorsement of Western cultural notions of beauty and appearance. Therefore, we expect assimilation ideology would be relevant to the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem.

Racial Identity, Gender and Body Image an Intersectional Framework

Just as is true of the research on self-esteem and appearance, extant research on the association between racial identity attitudes and feelings about appearance has focused on the experience of women (Harris 1995; Makkar and Strube 1995; Thompson 2006). Among young African American women, internalizing positive feelings about their own racial group has been found to be associated with rejection of Western culture's values regarding appearance-related pressures for women (Henrickson et al. 2010; Hesse-Biber 2004). Viewing videos that emphasize the thin ideal were less likely to predict body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and bulimic tendencies for African American women with strong ethnic group identification than for African American women whose ethnic group identification was weak (Zhang et al. 2009). An intersectional approach to the study of racial identity, self-esteem, and body attitudes in African Americans would also suggest that the interplay of body satisfaction and self-esteem may play out differently for African American men.

Intersectionality is a concept developed within feminist and race critical theory to describe analytic approaches that simultaneously consider the influence of multiple social categories (Cole 2009). Within psychology, this approach is particularly useful to theorize the influence of multiple social identities (Settles 2006). Intersectionality recognizes that the intersections of various social identities (such as African American women) result in a set of experiences that cannot be adequately understood by looking at each social identity in isolation. For instance, a number of authors have argued that African American women's attitudes regarding their body image and physical attractiveness can only be understood in the context of their racialized experience of gender (Buchanan et al. 2008; Byrd 2005; Duke 2000; Henrickson et al. 2010; Poran 2006). It is important to examine not only whether African American women and men differ in the association between body ideals and self-esteem, but also whether these differences are influenced by their racial identity attitudes.

The Current Research

There are several limitations in the extant literature on the associations among body image, racial identity, and self-esteem among African Americans. Much of the existing research has not fully taken into account the multidimensional nature of racial identity (Harris 1995; Smith et al. 1991), and thus has not focused on the ways that various dimensions may be related to self-esteem and with body attitudes differentially. A second limitation is that the majority of studies have focused on the direct association between body image and self-esteem to the exclusion of possible moderating relationships (Harris 1995; Hesse-Biber 2004; Molloy and Herzberger 1998; Smith et al. 1991). As a result, little is known as to whether the relationship between body attitudes and self-esteem differ for individuals with different racial identity attitudes and beliefs.

The present study addresses these limitations by investigating whether racial identity (Hypothesis 1) and gender (Hypothesis 2) moderate the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. We define body dissatisfaction as the discrepancy between actual and ideal body and the level of importance placed upon body ideals (Cash and Szymanski 1995). This study will focus on the concepts of racial centrality, public and private regard, and assimilation ideology from the MMRI.

We hypothesized that racial centrality will moderate the association between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem (Hypothesis 1a). Compared to mainstream Western culture, in traditional African American culture, character and values are more emphasized in the determination of self-worth than appearance (Hesse-Biber 2004; Jones 2003; Nobles 1991). Some researchers have argued that African Americans who more strongly identify with their racial/cultural group are also more likely to endorse a cultural ethos that values religious faith, community, and family commitment and devalues Western society's standards of beauty (Duke 2000; Jones 2003; Nobles 1991). Therefore, we predicted that the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem would be weaker for African Americans with higher levels of racial centrality as compared to individuals for whom race is a less central identity.

Second, we expected that private regard (the degree to which African Americans feel positively about their racial group) will also moderate the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem (Hypothesis 1b). African American women who view their ethnic group's culture favorably and actively incorporate experiences of ethnic culture also hold more favorable views of their appearance, health, and fitness (Harris 1995; Hesse-Biber 2004). African Americans who feel more positively about their ethnic group may base their self-esteem primarily on that group membership, rather than on their evaluations of their

appearance. We predicted that the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem would be weaker for those African Americans with high private regard as compared to those who feel less positively toward African Americans.

Third, we predicted that public regard (the degree to which African Americans believe that other groups feel positively about their racial group) will also moderate the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem (Hypothesis 1c). The relationship between higher body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem may be strengthened by low public regard attitudes. Perceptions of how out-group members view African Americans may be tied to negative gendered racial stereotypes that are focused on the body. African American women have historically been stereotyped as either asexual, self-less caretakers or sexual deviants lacking morals (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003; Collins 2000). These stereotypes are diametrically opposed to Western Anglo-Saxon notions of beauty and femininity (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003; Collins 2000). For African American men, stereotypes include violence-prone criminals, athletes, and hyper-masculine models (Majors 1993; Tate 2003; Tucker 2007; Wilkinson 1977). These stereotypes are not valued in the context of an academic setting, where students strive to be taken seriously as scholars. Given the embodied quality of these stereotypes, we expected that African Americans, both men and women, who believe that other groups hold more negative attitudes towards African Americans (low public regard) and who also experience high body dissatisfaction, will have the lowest levels of self-esteem as compared to other individuals.

Fourth, we also hypothesized that assimilation ideology will moderate the association between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem (Hypothesis 1d). There are two arguments to support this hypothesis. First, assimilation involves an adaptation of values and attitudes of the prevailing culture, including body ideals (Lake et al. 2000). Due to the negative and pervasive stereotypes of African Americans (Hancock 2004), endorsement of ideological attitudes reflecting racial assimilation could strengthen the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. Second, African Americans who endorse an assimilation ideology may also be more likely to integrate into Western culture. For highly assimilated African Americans, body dissatisfaction might be particularly detrimental because their body image comparison group is likely to include European Americans. African Americans face specific challenges when attempting to meet Western society's standards regarding Euro-centric facial features, hair texture and skin color (Collins 2004; Hesse-Biber 2004; Okazawa-Rey et al. 1987; Stephens and Few 2007; Thompson 2006). Thus, we predicted a stronger negative association between body

dissatisfaction and self-esteem for individuals who endorse an assimilation ideology as compared to individuals who do not endorse such an ideology.

Fifth, we predicted a significant gender difference in the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem (Hypothesis 2). Objectification theory suggests that women are treated as objects in the broader society and that much of their social worth is determined by their physical attractiveness to men based on consensually held beauty norms (Fredrickson et al. 1998; Mercurio and Landry 2008; Wolf 2002). This leads some women to link their sense of self-worth to their satisfaction with their own physical appearance. Buchanan and colleagues found partial evidence of the objectification process for a sample of African American women focusing specifically on their skin tone (Buchanan et al. 2008). However, they did not investigate whether these processes differed for African American men. Most men are not subjected to the same processes of objectification; thus, their overall self-worth may not be as strongly linked to their sense of physical attractiveness (Fredrickson et al. 1998). Therefore, we hypothesized that the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem would be stronger for African American women than for African American men.

To summarize, our hypotheses were as follows:

- H1: Racial identity would moderate the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for African American men and women.
- H1a: High racial centrality would be associated with a weaker relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem
- H1b: High private regard would be associated with a weaker relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem
- H1c: High public regard would be associated with a weaker relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem
- H1d: High assimilation ideology would be associated with a stronger relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem.
- H2: The relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem would be stronger for women than for men.

Method

Participants

These data were collected as part of a longitudinal study examining African American college students' daily experiences with racial identity. Four hundred and twenty five

self-identified African American second- and third-year university students (109 men and 316 women) were recruited from three universities located in three geographical regions in the United States. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 22 ($M=19.8$ years, $SD=.95$). University 1 is a medium-size private, historically African American university located on the East Coast ($n=133$). University 2 and 3 are large, public universities that are predominantly European American; University 2 is located in the Southeast ($n=138$) and University 3 is located in the Midwest ($n=154$).

Procedure

The Office of the Registrar at the two predominantly European American Universities provided contact information for all students who self-identified as African American on their applications. We used this information to recruit students via email and telephone solicitations, inviting them to participate in a study examining African American students' daily experiences pertaining to race. At the historically African American university, we employed campus-wide outreach methods including fliers and classroom announcements. At all three sites we communicated that the study examined the daily life experiences of students, and that payment was offered for participation.

The recruiters at the historically African American university were three African Americans (one man and two women). Four African Americans (one man and three women) recruited at the Southeast predominantly European American university. The recruiters at the Midwestern predominantly European American university included two African American women, one Asian American man, and one European American woman. The Asian American and European American recruiter were only involved in the phone and email recruiting, but did not participate in any of the in-person recruitment efforts. At all three institutions, researchers asked potential participants screening questions to ensure that they self-identified as African American and were at least 18 years of age. Eligible students were asked to schedule a time to come to a lab to complete a web-based survey within 2 weeks of initial contact. Participants completed instruments assessing racial identity, psychological well-being, racial experiences, and demographics as well as several other measures that were not used in the present study. Participants were paid \$15 for their participation in this phase of the study.

Measures

Body Dissatisfaction

Body dissatisfaction was assessed using the Body Ideals Questionnaire (BIQ), a 22-item measure of body attitudes

(Cash and Szymanski 1995). This scale contains two types of questions: Body Image Importance (11 items) and Body Image Discrepancy (11 items). Body Image Importance questions assess a person's cognitive-behavioral emphasis on their appearance. A sample item is "How important to you are your ideal body proportions? (0 = *not important*, 3 = *very important*)." Body Image Discrepancy questions measure cognitive appraisals and associated emotions of appearance. A sample item is "My ideal body proportions are: (0 = *exactly as I am*, 3 = *very unlike me*)." For each aspect of the body, the body image discrepancy and importance questions were presented. The aspects included: height, skin complexion, hair texture and thickness, facial features (eyes, nose, ears, and facial shape), muscle tone and definition, body proportions, weight, chest size, physical strength, physical coordination, and overall physical appearance.

From these questions, the Body Dissatisfaction total score was created. All Body Image Discrepancy scores for "*exactly as I am*" were recoded from 0 to -1 and then Body Image Discrepancy was multiplied by the Importance score on each item; these were then averaged to create the Body Dissatisfaction score. This calculation allows Body Dissatisfaction scores to include importance-weighted self-ideal congruence ("*exactly as I am*") for each item, and the recode avoids a score of 0 for cross-product scores (Cash and Szymanski 1995). The scale ranges from -3 to 9 and a higher score on Body Dissatisfaction indicates that the body ideals are important to the individual and there is a great discrepancy between actual appearance and one's ideal. For this and all other scales, participants who did not complete a minimum number of items (approximately 2/3 of the items on the scale) were dropped from subsequent analyses. On this scale we required at least seven valid items for each subscale for analysis. From a sample of college students, the internal consistency reliability estimate for Body Dissatisfaction was $\alpha=.77$ (Cash and Szymanski 1995). In the current study, the Body Dissatisfaction alpha was .81.

Racial Identity

Relevant racial identity attitudes from the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity were assessed using four subscales from Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity- Short (MIBI-S: Martin et al. 2010). These subscales include: centrality, private regard, public regard and assimilationist ideology. The MIBI-S is a 27-item revised version of the original Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers et al. 1997) and measures the three stable dimensions of racial identity as proposed by the MMRI.

The Centrality subscale (4 items) measures the extent to which respondents feel being an African American defines them. A sample item is "being Black is important to my self image." A high Centrality score indicates that race is

important to their self definition. The Regard scale includes two subscales, Private (3 items) and Public (4 items). Private Regard measures the extent to which individuals feel positively toward African Americans. A sample item is “I am happy that I am Black.” A high Private Regard score indicates positive feelings toward African Americans. Public Regard items measure the extent to which respondents feel that other groups have positive feelings toward African Americans. A sample item is “Overall, Blacks are considered good by others.” A high Public Regard score indicates a belief that others have positive feelings toward African Americans. The Assimilation Ideology (4 items) subscale measures the extent to which individuals emphasize similarities between African Americans and Western society. A sample item is “Blacks should strive to be full members of the American political system.” High scores indicate greater endorsement of Assimilation Ideology. Participants used a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) to rate each item. For each subscale, participants’ scores were calculated by averaging their responses to the items, thus allowing the use of the response anchors to interpret the scale scores. Martin et al. validated these subscales on African American college students. Their results indicate the following alphas for each subscale: Centrality ($\alpha=.79$), Private Regard ($\alpha=.64$), Public Regard ($\alpha=.78$), and Assimilation ($\alpha=.71$). In the current study, the Centrality alpha was .84, the Private Regard alpha was .79, the Public Regard alpha was .82, and the Assimilation alpha was .77.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-esteem (RSE) scale (Rosenberg 1965). The RSE is a 10-item measure. A sample item is “I take a positive attitude toward myself,” and items are scored along a scale ranging from 0 = *strongly disagree* to 3 = *strongly agree*. In a study of African American college students, Utsey et al. (2000) found an alpha score of .83. Scale scores for the current study were calculated by averaging responses to the items and the alpha was .88.

Body Mass Index

Participants self-reported their height and weight which were converted into Body Mass Index (BMI: weight in kg/height in m²). The mean BMI was 25.17 ($SD=5.3$), which is roughly the threshold for the overweight category according to the Center for Disease Control (Flegal et al. 1998). However, there is some controversy about the classification of weight status using BMI for African Americans (Deurenberg and Deurenberg-Yap 2001). Body mass index was included as a control variable, since

previous research has found that it is strongly linked to body attitudes, and we wanted to ensure that the analyses of moderation were not confounded by participants’ BMI (e.g., Kennet and Nisbet 1998; Watkins et al. 2008).

Results

Preliminary and Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the demographic, predictor, moderator, and criterion variables for the students by gender from the three universities. Men at University 1 had the lowest assimilation scores and their scores were significantly lower than men at University 3. The assimilation scores for men at University 2 were not significantly different than men at University 1 or University 3. For men, there were no mean differences in the other variables across the schools. Women at University 1 had higher mean racial centrality scores and self esteem; these students felt that race was more central to them and had higher self-esteem than women at University 2 and University 3. On average, women at University 1 also had significantly lower assimilation scores and lower body dissatisfaction than the other two schools. Women at University 2 had significantly lower private regard scores compared to women at the other two schools, meaning that they felt the least positively about being African American. Women at University 3 had lower public regard scores than the other schools, indicating that they felt that others viewed African Americans more negatively. There were no mean differences in age and body mass index across schools for women.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the scales as well as multivariate analysis of variance comparing men and women’s mean scores on the predictor and criterion variables. The sample mean was above the scale midpoint on centrality, which suggests that being an African American was quite central to their identity. On average, the participants felt positively about being an African American, as reflected in the high mean private regard score. The sample mean was below the midpoint on public regard, which indicates that participants generally did not view out-group members as feeling positively about African Americans. In general, the sample believed that African Americans should assimilate into Western society, as indicated by the high mean assimilation ideology score. The mean self-esteem score for this sample was high, which is comparable with previous research on African American student samples (Rowley et al. 1998). On average, the sample held positive attitudes about their appearance, as indicated by the low mean on the body dissatisfaction scale. Women felt that race was more central

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) for the effects of gender by university on 11 demographic, predictor, and criterion variables

Variable	Men						Women						MANOVA			
	University 1		University 2		University 3		University 1		University 2		University 3		Men		Women	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	df	F	df	F
Racial Identity- Centrality	5.68	.91	5.34	1.20	5.61	1.41	6.01 ^a	.85	5.50 ^b	1.08	5.69 ^b	1.19	2.00	1.28	2.00	4.00*
Racial Identity- Private Regard	5.91	1.16	6.06	1.01	6.04	1.10	6.47 ^b	.58	6.15 ^a	.90	6.32 ^b	.75	2.00	1.13	2.00	4.65*
Racial Identity- Public Regard	3.82	1.10	4.01	1.30	3.61	1.16	3.62 ^b	1.04	3.95 ^b	.96	3.17 ^a	1.20	2.00	.91	2.00	12.81***
Racial Identity- Assimilation	5.83 ^a	.93	6.03 ^{ab}	1.03	6.31 ^b	.55	5.79 ^a	.97	6.12 ^b	.79	6.28 ^b	.63	2.00	3.78*	2.00	11.80***
Self-esteem	2.56	.44	2.39	.48	2.44	.55	2.53 ^a	.46	2.38 ^b	.45	2.41 ^b	.56	2.00	.36	2.00	6.22*
Body dissatisfaction	.76	1.63	1.05	1.51	1.45	1.21	.84 ^a	1.32	1.33 ^b	1.67	1.10 ^b	1.19	2.00	.71	2.00	4.34*
Body Mass Index	25.06	4.05	25.62	4.25	24.75	5.07	25.76	6.07	25.59	5.70	24.19	4.84	2.00	.71	2.00	.82
Age	19.80	.94	19.92	.68	19.72	.67	19.61	1.30	19.56	.74	19.70	.60	2.00	.68	2.00	.50

N=425; age range was 18 to 22 years; Body mass index range was 16.46–51.68; University 1 is the East Coast historically Black university, University 2 is the predominantly European American university in the Southeast and University 3 is the Midwestern predominantly European American university; Means with the same letter subscript are not significantly different from each other at the **p*<.05. ***p*<.01. ****p*<.001.

to their identities (centrality) and felt more positively about being African American (private regard) than men. Men had a significantly higher public regard scores than women, meaning that men felt that others viewed African Americans more positively than women felt. There were no significant gender differences on the measures of assimilation, self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and body mass index.

The correlations indicated that body dissatisfaction was negatively associated with self-esteem for both women and men. For men, body dissatisfaction was negatively associated with centrality, private and public regard. For women, private regard was negatively correlated with body dissatisfaction. Racial assimilation ideology was unrelated to body dissatisfaction. For men, body mass index was negatively related to racial centrality, private regard, and body dissatisfaction. For women, body mass index was not related to any dimensions of racial identity or self-esteem, but was positively related to body dissatisfaction.

Tests of the Hypotheses

We assessed the assumption of normality for errors in the regression model by examining the quartile-quartile plots and histograms of residuals. We also accessed the assumption of constant variance in residuals by examining scatter plots of residuals against predicted values. Examination of these diagnostic plots supported the assumptions in the model. Preliminary analyses included body mass index as a covariate in all of our models; however, because body mass index was not a significant predictor of self-esteem, it was dropped in subsequent analysis.

To test whether racial identity and gender moderated the association between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem (Hypotheses 1 and 2), we used hierarchical regression with list wise deletion of missing data, before any of the analyses were conducted, as our primary method of analysis. In order to properly test for interactions, we centered all predictor and moderator variables except gender by subtracting the mean from every participant’s value of a predictor variable (Aiken and West 1991; Frazier et al. 2004). The criterion variable was self-esteem. Step 1 included body dissatisfaction, the predictor variable, as well as the moderating variables, which include gender and four dimensions of racial identity. We controlled for main effects due to gender. We coded our gender variable such that men were coded as 0 and women were coded as 1. Step 2 included the interactions of the moderators (centrality, private and public regard, assimilation, and gender) and the predictor variable (body dissatisfaction). The interaction terms were created through multiplying the two centered variables together (except in the case of gender).

Table 2 Correlations, descriptive statistics, and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) for variables for men (above diagonal) and women (below diagonal)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Range	M (SD) Men	M (SD) Women	MANOVA	
											df	F
1. Centrality	—	.70***	.30***	.28**	.58***	-.23**	-.16*	1.00–7.00	5.50 (1.00)	6.00 (1.11)	1	3.96**
2. Private Regard	.68***	—	.28**	.41***	.49***	-.12*	-.17*	2.00–7.00	6.03 (1.06)	6.32 (.76)	1	8.75***
3. Public Regard	.05	.09	—	.19**	.23***	-.30**	-.06	1.00–6.75	3.88 (1.29)	3.56 (1.12)	1	6.97***
4. Assimilation	.01	.13**	.07	—	.36***	-.04	.04	1.50–7.00	6.09 (.88)	6.06 (.83)	1	.02
5. Self-esteem	.26***	.30***	.15***	.11**	—	-.29**	-.08	.20–3.00	2.44 (.50)	2.44 (.50)	1	.00
6. Body dissatisfaction	-.07	-.22***	-.10*	.01	-.35***	—	2.33**	-2.60–9.00	1.15 (1.45)	1.08 (1.14)	1	.05
7. Body Mass Index	.05	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.03	.35***	—	16.46–51.68	25.22 (4.50)	25.15 (5.57)	1	.08

$N=425$, * $p<.05$. ** $p<.01$. *** $p<.001$.

The overall regression model was significant, $F(11, 414)=16.49$, $p<.05$, and explained 30% of the variance in participants' self-esteem. The results also revealed significant main effects for centrality, private regard, public regard, assimilation, and body dissatisfaction on self-esteem (Table 3). Higher body dissatisfaction was related to lower self-esteem. All effects for the racial identity variables on self-esteem were positive. Specifically, centrality, private and public regard, and endorsement of assimilationist ideology were all associated with higher self-esteem. Gender was not independently associated with self-esteem.

Testing Moderation

Our analyses indicated significant interactions between body dissatisfaction and three dimensions of racial identity (centrality, private regard, and public regard) on self-esteem. For each significant interaction, we plotted the predicted values of self-esteem for individuals with scores one standard deviation above and below the mean on the predictor variables. As predicted for Hypothesis 1a, we found evidence that racial centrality moderated the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for men and women (Fig. 1). Linear regression analyses

Table 3 Regression analysis summary for self-esteem

Step	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	Final β	Cumulative R^2	Adjusted R^2	Incremental R^2	Incremental F
1					.25	.24	.25	23.42***
	Constant	2.43	.04					
	Body dissatisfaction	-.05	.03	-.14				
	Centrality	.09	.03	.20***				
	Private Regard	.07	.04	.12				
	Public Regard	.04	.02	.10*				
	Assimilation	.09	.03	.14*				
	Gender	-.03	.05	-.02				
	Overall $F(6, 419)=23.42***$							
2					.30	.29	.05	6.38***
	Constant	2.46	.04					
	Body dissatisfaction X Centrality	.07	.02	.21*				
	Body dissatisfaction X Private Regard	-.09	.03	-.20*				
	Body dissatisfaction X Public Regard	.06	.01	.18***				
	Body dissatisfaction X Assimilation	-.02	.02	-.05				
	Body dissatisfaction X Gender	-.09	.04	-.21*				
	Overall $F(11, 414)=16.49***$							

Gender was coded as 0=men and 1=women; * $p<.05$. ** $p<.01$. *** $p<.001$.

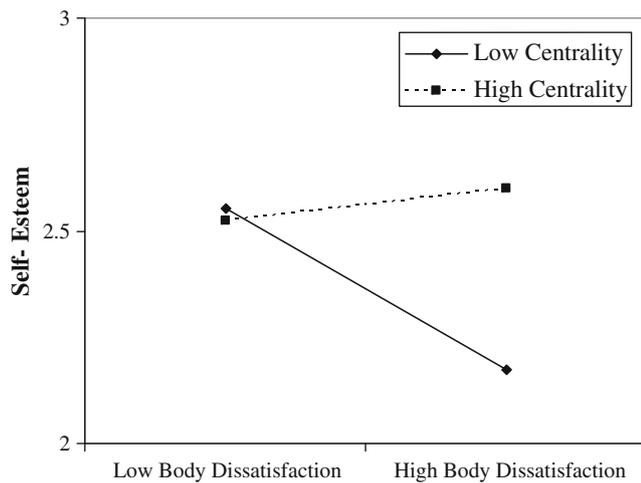


Fig. 1 Simple regression line showing relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem with centrality as a moderator

indicated that the slope of the regression line for body dissatisfaction predicting self-esteem was negative for those low in centrality, $t(414)=-1.69, p<.10$, while the regression slope for high centrality participants was not significantly different than 0, $t(414)=.64, ns$. The results indicate that high racial centrality buffered the association between body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem.

We also found a significant interaction between private regard and body dissatisfaction in predicting self-esteem; however, the nature of this interaction differs somewhat from what was hypothesized (1b). Our analyses indicated that the slope for those low in private regard was not significantly different than 0, $t(414)=-.27, ns$; however, the slope for those high in private regard was negative and significant, $t(414)=-2.09, p<.05$. Figure 2 indicates that African Americans who felt positively about their racial group and who reported lower levels of body dissatisfaction reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem as compared to those who were also high in private regard, but felt greater body dissatisfaction. In contrast, African Americans who felt less positively about their group reported lower self-esteem regardless of their level of satisfaction with their body.

In addition, we found evidence that public regard moderated the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem (see Fig. 3). Linear regressions revealed that the slope for those low public regard was negative and significantly different from 0, $t(414)=-2.28, p<.05$; however, the slope for high public regard was not significantly different from 0, $t(414)=-.04, ns$. This suggests that for participants high in public regard, body dissatisfaction was unrelated to self-esteem, but for those who believed that others view African Americans negatively, body dissatisfaction was associated with lower self-esteem. Thus, consistent with our hypothesis

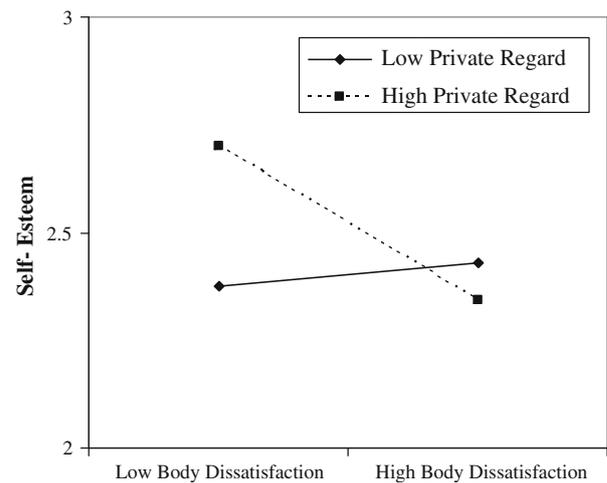


Fig. 2 Simple regression line showing relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem with private regard as a moderator

(1c), individuals who believed that others hold less positive attitudes towards African Americans and who are dissatisfied with their bodies had the lowest levels of self-esteem compared to all other participants in the study.

Hypothesis 1d was not supported; results indicated no significant interaction between assimilation ideology and body dissatisfaction.

As predicted, Hypothesis 2 was supported. Gender moderated the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. Plotting this interaction revealed that body dissatisfaction was associated with self-esteem for both women and men; however, this effect was stronger for

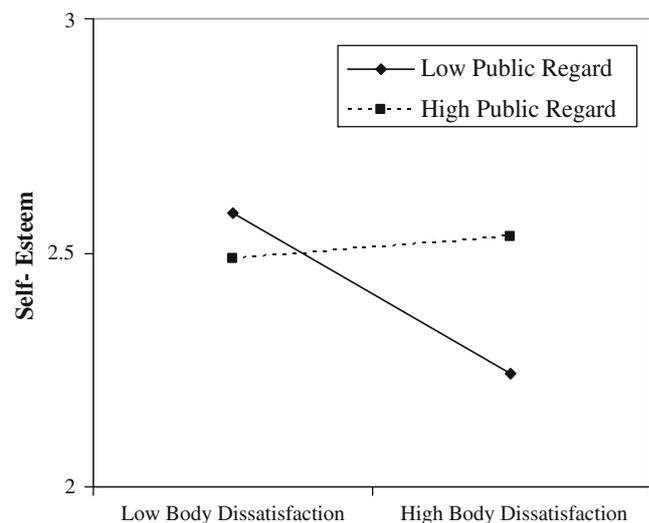


Fig. 3 Simple regression line showing relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem with public regard as a moderator

women (Fig. 4). Our analyses indicate that the slopes of body dissatisfaction predicting self esteem were negative and significantly different from 0 for both men, $t(414)=-2.20$, $p<.01$, and women, $t(414)=-7.12$, $p<.01$, but that the slope for women was steeper, $t(414)=-2.85$, $p<.01$. Thus, body dissatisfaction was more strongly associated with personal self-esteem for women than men.

Discussion

Results showed that African American college students' body dissatisfaction was associated with self-esteem and this relationship was moderated by racial centrality, private and public regard, and gender. Body dissatisfaction was unrelated to self-esteem for African Americans who were high in racial centrality. However, body dissatisfaction was associated with self-esteem for low race central African Americans such that those who were less satisfied with their bodies had lower self-esteem. Racial group membership was a valued social group for many of the participants of this study. This was indicated by both the high mean scores on racial centrality and the fact that racial centrality was positively correlated with self-esteem for both men and women. The findings suggest that individuals who view race as central to their identities are more likely to report high self-esteem, even if they experience body dissatisfaction. Conversely, those who were high in body dissatisfaction reported lower self-esteem only if they did not view race as central to their identities. One possible explanation for this finding is that individuals with higher race centrality may also be more likely to endorse a traditional African American cultural ethos. Some authors have argued that an African American ethos may de-emphasize appear-

ance in the evaluation of self-worth (Duke 2000; Jones 2003; Nobles 1991).

Private regard moderated the association between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for men and women such that individuals who were high in private regard and low in body dissatisfaction reported the highest self-esteem scores. However, the nature of this moderation was not as we hypothesized. Positive feelings about one's racial group were associated with a stronger, not weaker, relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. An examination of Fig. 2 indicates that individuals who were more dissatisfied with their body and who felt less positively toward their racial group had the lowest self-esteem. This finding suggests the synergistic nature of various contributors to the development of self-esteem (Crocker et al. 2003). Our results indicate that feeling positively about both one's racial group and one's appearance seems to have a synergistic benefit in positive feelings about self. On average, African Americans with the highest self-esteem were both satisfied with their physical appearance and felt positively about their racial group.

Based on the mean scores for public regard, African Americans in this sample generally felt that out-group members viewed them negatively. However, among those high in public regard, self-esteem was unrelated to body dissatisfaction. In contrast, participants who reported high body dissatisfaction and low public regard on average reported lower self-esteem relative to others. Research shows that members of historically devalued groups, such as African Americans, who learn to expect negative evaluation from out-group members attribute negative feedback from others as group prejudice and devalue those evaluations, thus protecting self-esteem (Crocker and Major 1989; Major et al. 2007; Major and O'Brien 2005). However, in the current study, African Americans who perceived the most negative evaluations by out-groups experienced a stronger relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. Again, it seems there is a synergistic effect of believing that other groups hold more negative attitudes toward African Americans and dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance, but in this case it was associated with lower levels of overall self-esteem.

Contrary to our hypothesis, assimilation ideology did not moderate the relationship between body attitudes and self-esteem. We predicted that individuals who were more likely to endorse an assimilation attitude would have a greater association between their dissatisfaction with their appearance and their overall self-esteem. We based this prediction on the belief that individuals who endorse an assimilation ideology would be more likely to also endorse Western standards of beauty. The concept of assimilation in the MMRI does not make

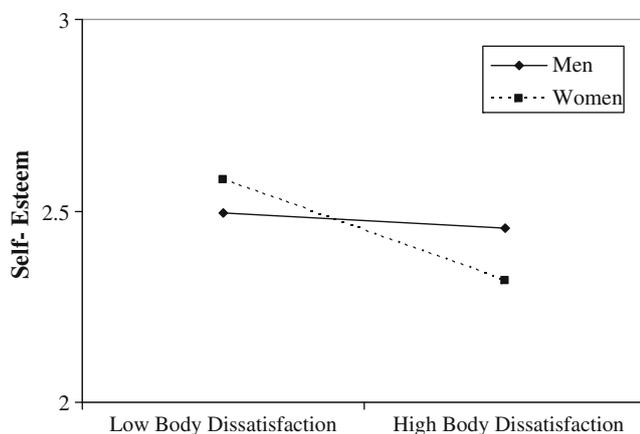


Fig. 4 Simple regression line showing relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem with gender as a moderator

such an assumption (Sellers et al. 1998). The assimilation ideology as operationalized by the MIBI-S does not measure actual assimilation behaviors, only attitudes about how African Americans should behave in relation to Western society. The distinction of this dimension of racial identity as an ideological orientation may render it less suited as a moderator in this type of model. Perhaps using a measure that was designed to assess the level to which participants actually integrate into Western society would have yielded a more appropriate test of our hypothesis.

Consistent with findings based on European American samples (Furnham 2002; Grossbard et al. 2009; Henriques and Calhoun 1999; Mintz and Betz 1986; Molloy and Herzberger 1998), body dissatisfaction was associated with self-esteem for both African American men and women. Also consistent with previous findings, this relationship was stronger for women than for men. One potential mediating factor in the gender difference in the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem may be the extent to which men and women view themselves in terms of their physical appearance. As noted above, a number of authors have argued that women in Western society are socialized to view themselves and their appearance as objects (e.g., Fredrickson et al. 1998). Further research is needed that measures individuals' sense of body objectification to determine whether it is an actual mediator. It would be particularly interesting to determine whether African American men, who have been objectified, such as athletes, have a stronger association between their body attitudes and their self-esteem. African American women may face specific appearance related stressors, because they can be affected by the often difficult to achieve and sometimes incongruous standards from both the African American and Western cultures (Poran 2006). The gender difference in the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem may be due to the nature and extent of the objectification women face and the subsequent emphasis placed on the importance of appearance.

It is noteworthy that African American women scored higher than men on two of the three of the racial identity variables (centrality and private regard) that moderated the association between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. However, it is not surprising that a high racial identity cannot fully buffer African American women's self-esteem, given the importance placed on appearance for women in Western culture. It is also noteworthy that African American women are not passive victims to this dilemma. As noted above, on average, African American women (and men) in the present sample report high levels of personal self-esteem. Even the individuals whose reported lower levels of satisfaction with their bodies (and whose self-esteem scores were relatively

lower than their counterparts) reported scores corresponding to positive feelings towards themselves.

Limitations

In interpreting these findings, there are a few limitations that must be taken into consideration. First, the present study examined gender differences in the interplay between racial identity, body dissatisfaction, and self-esteem using an intersectional lens in interpreting the results. However, the present study did not specifically assess participants' attitudes regarding the significance and meaning that they attach to gender. Future research should include such an assessment to build upon the foundation laid by the findings from the present study. A second limitation is the fact that the participants in this study were from various economic backgrounds, but were all college students. Educational background may shape how body attitudes and self-esteem are related (Paeratakul et al. 2002). Body attitudes may become less significant with age (Demarest and Allen 2000). Future research in this area should look at individuals of different ages and educational backgrounds. A third limitation is that there was no measure of sexual orientation. Previous research has found that sexual orientation can be related to body attitudes for both men and women (Herzog et al. 1991; Herzog et al. 1992). A fourth limitation is that the order of presentation of the measures in the survey was not counterbalanced, thus allowing for the possibility of a potential order effect within the results. It should be noted, however, that participants were presented with several other measures in between the presentation of the main measures used in the present study. Finally, this study was cross-sectional and the direction of the causal link between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem can only be speculated upon and not empirically tested. Longitudinal research is needed before causal interpretations can be made.

Conclusions

The intersectional approach of this study recognizes the phenomenological experience of being a member of multiple social categories and explores the multidimensional nature of racial group identification. This study extends our knowledge of individual differences in the embodied experiences of African Americans and highlights the importance of within-group analysis. Relying solely on comparative studies may obscure important information about the process through which body attitudes affects the lives of African Americans. This research lends empirical support to the claim that body attitudes have different meaning for African American

men and women. Although racial identity variables moderated the association between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem similarly for men and women, our findings indicate that the association between dissatisfaction and self-esteem is stronger for African American women than men. This study highlights the importance of an intersectional framework for understanding the role of race and gender in the relationship between self-esteem and body attitudes for African Americans.

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