

### **003. Self-Image, Obesity, and African American Women**

*Friday, October 6, 2017*

A Collins, J Leafman  
A.T. Still University

#### **Purpose**

Obesity has become a worldwide epidemic and the percentage of African American women is among the highest diagnosed as overweight or obese. Obesity increases the risks of co-morbidities as well as negative psychological effects. There is a discrepancy between the medical community and minority populations, specifically African Americans, as to what is physiologically considered obese or overweight. The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study is to examine the relationship between an obesity diagnosis and the self-image of college educated African American women.

#### **Methods**

The survey used for this study was modified using three body image surveys with the approval from the creator of the original surveys. The final survey included demographic, body image, and self-image variables. Captured were self-perceptions of body and self-image in different environments, as well as, how the judgment of others affected participant's impressions of themselves.

This quantitative descriptive study was approved by ATSU's Institutional Review Board and the survey was uploaded to Survey Monkey.

African American women were recruited from one of four predominately African American sororities, identified as Sorority X. There were a total of 98 respondents with 66 that matched the inclusion criteria. Demographics requested were self-reported indications of race, age, education level, height, weight, and BMI.

Data was retrieved after 13.5 weeks and downloaded from Survey Monkey to SPSS on a password-protected personal computer owned by the primary investigator and analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Version 23.

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum were conducted for all variables and a Wilk-Shapiro test was conducted to determine normality. Results revealed distribution to be uneven; therefore non-parametric testing was performed.

A two-tailed Spearman correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between the output variable and the ordinal dependent variables. Alpha level was set at  $p=0.05$ . Upon completion of the output variable analysis, additional correlations between independent variables were further explored and analyzed to examine significant relationships.

#### **Results**

Results showed 53% ( $n=35$ ) of overall participants strongly and very strongly felt an obesity diagnosis affected their self-image and 4.5% ( $n=3$ ) indicated an obesity diagnosis did not affect their self image at all. Thirteen (19.7%) participants reported an obesity diagnosis minimally affected their self-image.

Eighty-seven percent (n = 57) of participants strongly agreed they had thoughts of being thinner or reducing body fat and 78.8% (n=52) of participants agreed they felt pressure by the media to look thinner and reduce their body fat.

40.9% (n=27) of participants did not compare their body sizes to others when they were eating at a restaurant, but the results showed a strong correlation to participants overall self-image when comparing their body size to others at a restaurant (0.361).

Results showed participants strongly agreed that most pressure to be thin and reduce body fat came from the participants themselves (87%) and the media (47%) as compared to pressure to be thin and reduce body fat from family (15.2%) and peers (9.1%).

The results showed 30 (45.5%) participants reported the opinions of others were never important to them regarding their body size and 15 (22.7%) always thought, wondered, or was bothered what other people thought of their body size.

Thirty-five (53.1%) participants reported they disagreed and strongly disagreed their peers' thoughts of them being thinner affected their self-image and 36 (55.5%) reported they disagreed and strongly disagreed their peer's thoughts of reducing their body fat affected their self-image.

Twenty-eight (42.4%) participants reported when meeting new people they never wondered what the person thought of their body size and 30 (45.5%) participants reported they never thought the opinion of others regarding their body size was important.

## **Conclusions**

This research study revealed, for the population tested, a medical diagnosis of obesity using only the BMI tool does affect overall self-image of college educated, African American women, 30-45 years old; especially when participants compared their body size and idea of being thinner to strangers, friends/peers, family, and images in the media. The results of this study could be important for encouraging providers to consider the psychological component of an obesity diagnosis and how it affects the way African American women view themselves. The potential benefit to society regarding this study would be an awareness of the effect of obesity on the self-image of African American women. The discrepancy of the African American female's perception of body image as it relates to obesity is paramount to understanding how to address this topic in the African American community and should be further studied.