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Skye Sakashita

Desiree Crevecoeur-MacPhail

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Cultural Influences on Exercise Type and Body Confidence in Women

Skye Sakashita & Desiree Crevecoeur-MacPhail

Introduction

There are numerous cultural differences between Asian American women and White American women. Asian American women often face pressures from both White body ideals they see portrayed in the media as well as Asian body ideals from their ethnic culture. Previous research found that White women viewed exercise as a daily requirement whereas ethnic minority women including Asian women viewed exercise as a personal luxury which sometimes is interpreted as selfish in their family oriented culture (Im, Ko, Hwang, Chee, Stuijbergen, Walker, & Brown, 2014). The Ethnic Identity Measure examines how participants feel regarding their ethnic group in terms of attachment, belonging, and other related factors (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The purpose of this study was to determine the effect that ethnic identity and cultural influences may have on the fitness lifestyle of an individual, specifically Asian or White women living in America.

Methods

Participants

Our sample included 58 adult women (33 ethnic minority women and 25 White women) between the ages of 18-24 and responses were collected via Chapman University's psychology participant pool and social media platforms.

Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999). Participants rated their agreement with statements about ethnic identity such as "I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group" and answered on a 5 point scale (from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree)

Social Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-4 (SATAQ-4) (Schaeffer et al., 2015). Participants rated their agreement with statements about attitudes towards appearance such as "I want my body to look very thin." and answered on a 5 point scale (from 1= definitely disagree to 5= definitely agree)

Reasons for Exercise Inventory (Silberstein, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1988). Participants rated their agreements with statements about exercise habits and all statements were in response to the overarching question of "To what extent is each of the following an important reason that you have for exercising?" The statements included "To be slim." "To improve my overall health." on a 7 point scale (from 1= not at all important to 7= extremely important).



T-Test

Group Statistics					
	Ethnic Minority	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total cultural BI (higher scores=more pressure)	Ethnic Minority	33	21.5758	2.70564	1.34138
	White	25	19.1600	6.49153	1.29831

Independent Samples Test									
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Total cultural BI (higher scores=more pressure)	1.585	.213	1.264	56	.212	2.41576	1.91181	-1.41406	6.24558
			1.294	55.314	.201	2.41576	1.86679	-1.32489	6.15641

T-Test

Group Statistics					
	Ethnic Minority	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total Commentary (higher scores=more commentary)	Ethnic Minority	33	38.4545	10.02525	1.74517
	White	25	35.3200	9.45921	1.89184

Independent Samples Test									
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Total Commentary (higher scores=more commentary)	.414	.513	1.208	56	.232	3.13455	2.59491	-2.06368	8.33277
			1.218	53.286	.229	3.13455	2.57385	-2.02729	8.29638

Results/Discussion

Hypothesis 1 stated that ethnic minority women would feel more cultural pressure regarding body image than white women. Two t tests were run to test this first hypothesis. The first t test was run to examine the differences between the ethnic minority group and the white group on a measure of ethnic identity and indicated that there was a significant difference between the ethnic minority and white groups in terms of score on the ethnic identity measure, $t(56) = 4.49, p = <.001$. A second t-test was run to examine the differences between the ethnic minority group and the white group on a measure of cultural pressure regarding body image and found that there was not a significant difference between the ethnic minority and white groups in terms of cultural pressure regarding body image $t(56) = 1.26, p = .212$. Hypothesis 2 stated that women are more likely to list physical appearance as a reason for exercise rather than health. Hypothesis 3 stated that ethnic minority women subjected to commentary regarding appearance will be more likely to have appearance related reasons for exercise compared to white women subject to commentary regarding appearance. Hypothesis 4 stated that women whose mothers are an immigrant from a foreign country will feel more cultural pressure regarding fitness compared to women whose mothers were born and raised in The United States of America. None of the results were significant so therefore none of the hypotheses were supported. However, there was a significant difference between the appearance and health group in terms of score on the reasons for exercise measure, $t(37) = -2.24, p = .03$ but this was the opposite of what hypothesis 2 stated. The insignificance of the results suggest that the hypotheses may need to be altered in future research.