Review article

Body image and internalization of appearance ideals in Black women: An update and call for culturally-sensitive research

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A B S T R A C T

Extant research on body image supports sociocultural theories emphasizing the internalization of societal pressures to attain the thin-ideal, as well as other White or Eurocentric ideals that are predominant in mainstream media. While earlier research suggests that Black women are less likely to report body dissatisfaction and thin-ideal internalization compared to women of other racial backgrounds, recent studies argue that most measures of body image and appearance ideals may not be accurate assessments of body dissatisfaction for this population. In this paper, we summarize the literature over the past two decades on body image and appearance ideals among cisgender Black girls and women and discuss the applications of well-established sociocultural theories of body dissatisfaction. We additionally highlight existing gaps in culturally-sensitive theory and assessment tools and consider the benefits of applying intersectionality-informed research. We lastly propose future directions in research, assessment, and intervention to develop more culturally-sensitive approaches to identifying, assessing, and addressing body dissatisfaction among Black girls and women. This paper encourages researchers to apply culturally-sensitive and inter-sectionality-informed theory to improve efforts in assessing early warning signs of body dissatisfaction and developing effective interventions for this population.

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1. Introduction

Burgeoning research on body image over the past two decades has indicated a need for more culturally-sensitive theory and assessment to better understand the development of body dissatisfaction among Black women (Cassidy, Sbrocco, & Tanofsky-Kraf, 2015; Kashubeck-West, Coker, Awad, Stinson, Bledman & Mintz, 2013; Watson, Lewis, & Moody, 2019). Recent studies have highlighted the limitations of earlier research indicating that Black women are more protected from body dissatisfaction than women of other racial backgrounds (Awad, Kashubeck-West, Bledman, Coker, Stinson & Mintz, 2020; Capodilupo, 2015), suggesting that existing theories and measures of body dissatisfaction may not be valid for Black women as most are based on the experiences of primarily White young women (Cassidy et al., 2015; Davis, Sbrocco, Odoms-Young & Smith, 2010; Kashubeck-West et al. 2013). Such critiques raise the question of whether such theories and measures are, in fact, racially-biased and if crucial aspects of body image and appearance ideals are missing from our assessments.

This paper contextualizes and synthesizes the last two decades of literature on body image and appearance ideals among Black women.[1] Specifically, we set up the context of the review by discussing the history of the marginalization and objectification of Black female bodies and the implications of how such contexts contribute to body image concerns among Black girls and women. Then, we present the review and its findings in terms of the application of well-established theories of body image for this population and ongoing gaps in assessment of body dissatisfaction and appearance ideals. Lastly, we highlight the importance of culturally-sensitive and intersectionality-informed approaches to guide future directions in body image research. We acknowledge that race is a political and social construct that is often used as a proxy for the impact of racist practices and structural inequalities in research (Buchanan, Perez, Prinstein & Thurston, 2020). As we discuss various

pathways and sociocultural contexts that contribute to body dissatisfaction for this population, it is crucial to acknowledge the broader complex sociopolitical climate. This synthesis of the literature should therefore be interpreted with a critical eye to identify ways in which body image research has contributed to and can challenge institutional racism to guide more culturally-sensitive assessment and intervention.

1.1. Methodology of literature search

Articles for this review were initially selected from a previous electronic literature search conducted in July 2017 for a related meta-analytic review using PsycINFO, PubMed, and Medline. An updated literature search was conducted in August 2020 to account for additional studies. The following search terms were initially used to locate a broad range of studies: (1) eating disorder, disordered eating, eating pathology, eating behavior, bulimi*(bulimia, bulimic), bing*(binge, bingeing), and restrict*(restrict, restriction, restricting); (2) Black or African American; and (3) women, female, or girl. The following search terms were additionally applied for the purposes of this review: body image, body dissatisfaction, thin ideal, muscular ideal, curvy ideal, critical race theory, and intersectionality. Search terms were limited to titles, abstracts, and keywords of articles with the intention of eliminating articles that did not explicitly examine these terms. Lastly, reference sections of identified articles, as well as related reviews, were also examined for studies not found previously. Articles published prior to 2001 were excluded from this review to highlight more recent literature over the past two decades. It should be noted that while this is not a systematic review, the initial selection of articles adheres to the guidelines reported in the PRISMA Statement (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman & The PRISMA Group, 2009). Please see Table 1 for detailed characteristics for all empirical studies included in this review.

1.2. Positionalities in this review

Research on Black female body image has historically been conducted by predominantly White researchers in academic settings, which can contribute to inaccurate conclusions about Black women's experiences and exacerbate patterns of oppressive methods of assessment and treatment of body image concerns for this population. It is therefore important to acknowledge our collective positionalities as authors of this review, which may impact not only how we synthesize the literature, but also our recommendations for future directions in research, assessment, and intervention. The first author

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[1] It should be noted that although researchers frequently use the terms "African American" and "Black" interchangeably to represent a broader racial group, this paper will use the term "Black" to refer to women identifying with Black or African culture. We argue that such terminology is more inclusive, as many women of African descent do not identify as "African American" because they are either not from the United States or prefer to identify more specifically from their countries of origin. However, it should be acknowledged that this terminology neglects the substantial heterogeneity within this population, potentially contributing to overgeneralizations about an ethnically diverse group. While it is important that future research investigates ethnic differences in body image and appearance ideals within this population, we intend to highlight existing gaps and future directions in research and assessment for Black women as a collective and diverse racial group.

Table 1
Characteristics of empirical studies on Black female body image (2001–2021) included in review.

Author (Year)	Study Design	Recruitment setting Age range (if not undergraduate students) Racial composition (if provided)	Other Demographic Variables
Awad et al. (2015)[a]	Qualitative	Large southwest university Student population 5% Black, 48% White	-Sexual orientation -SES
Awad et al. (2020)[a]	Quantitative	Midwestern metropolitan university	-Racial identity -Sexual orientation -Relationship status -Perceived SES -Perceived weight status -BMI
Bardone-Cone & Boyd (2007)[b]	Quantitative	Midwestern university	-Parental education -BMI
Buchanan et al. (2008)[a]	Quantitative	Large public midwestern university (18–59 years)	-Sexual orientation -SES
Burke et al. (2017)[b]	Quantitative	Community M (SD) age: 13.70 (2.60)	-BMI -Fat mass
Burke et al. (2021)[c]	Quantitative	University	-Sexual orientation -BMI
Burnette et al. (2020)[b]	Quantitative	Mid-Atlantic urban university Student population 50% White, 18% Black, 30% from underrepresented minority groups	-BMI
Capodilupo (2015)[a]	Mixed Methods	Community (20–36 years)	-Ethnicity -Education level -Income level -Perceived invisibility
Capodilupo & Kim (2014)[a]	Qualitative	Community (21–35 years)	-Ethnicity -Education
Cotter et al. (2015)[a]	Quantitative	Large mid-Atlantic urban university Student population 52% White, 19% Black	-Ethnic identity -BMI
Davis et al. (2010)[b]	Quantitative	Community in DC metro area M (SD) age: 41.40 (11.25)	-Ethnic identity -BMI -Income
DeBraganza & Hasenblas (2010)[b]	Quantitative	University	-Acculturation -BMI
Dunn et al. (2019)[a]	Quantitative	Community and University (18–24 years)	-Ethnic identity -Relationship status -Region of current residence -Hometown characteristics
Fitzsimmons-Craft & Bardone-Cone (2012)[b]	Quantitative	Midwestern university	-Parental education -BMI
Franko et al. (2004)[b]	Quantitative	Public/parochial schools and Girl Scout troops in three U.S. regions (9–10 years) Inner city, urban, and suburban areas represented	N/A
Frisby (2004)[a]	Mixed Methods	Large midwestern university	-Income -Education -Occupation
Gentles-Peart (2018)[a]	Qualitative	New York City (19–55 years)	-Generational status -SES -Country of origin -Education
Gilbert, Crump, Madhere, and Schutz (2009)[a]	Quantitative	Historically Black university	-Ethnicity -BMI
Gordon et al. (2010)[c]	Quantitative	Large southeastern university Student population predominantly White (70%)	-Countries of origin -Acculturation -Acculturative stress -Family income
Harper & Choma (2019)[a]	Mixed Methods	Community (18–60 years)	N/A
Hernández et al. (2021)[c]	Quantitative	Community (18–48 years)	-Sexual orientation -Education -Annual income -Marital status -Number of dependents -BMI
Hesse-Biber et al. (2010)[a]	Qualitative	Predominantly White northeastern college	-Ethnicity -Country/region of origin
Hughes (2021)[a]	Qualitative	Community in Los Angeles metropolitan area (19–71 years)	-Body size (unspecified method of assessment) -Education -Hometown
Hunter et al. (2017)[a]	Mixed Methods	Historically African American sororities at large southeastern university Student population predominantly White	-Sexual orientation -Relationship status -Region of origin -BMI
Hunter, Kluck, Ramon, Ruff, & Dario, 2021[c]	Quantitative	Community (18–34 years)	-BMI

Table 1 (*continued*)

Author (Year)	Study Design	Recruitment setting Age range (if not undergraduate students) Racial composition (if provided)	Other Demographic Variables
Javier et al. (2016)[b]	Quantitative	Large mid-Atlantic university (18–25 years) Student population 42% racial/ethnic minority	-BMI
Kashubeck-West et al. (2013)[a]	Quantitative	Midwestern metropolitan university	-Sexual orientation -Relationship status -Perceived SES -Perceived weight status -BMI
Katz et al. (2004)[a]	Mixed Methods	Community churches in NC cities (6–9 years) Female caregiver-child (6–9 years) dyads	-Type of primary female caregiver -Caregiver education -Median household income -BMI
Kelch-Oliver & Ancis (2011)[a]	Qualitative	Large southeastern university (23–34 years) Mix of predominantly White and HBCHU for undergraduate institutions	-Race/Ethnicity
Kelly, Cotter, & Mazzeo, 2012[b]	Quantitative	Public southeastern university	N/A
Kelly et al. (2012)[b]	Quantitative	Large public southeastern university	N/A
Kroon Van Diest et al. (2014)[c]	Quantitative	Large public southeastern university (17–25 years)	-Generational status -Country of origin
O'Garo et al. (2020)[a]	Quantitative	Large Jamaican university Student population 92% African decent	N/A
Overstreet et al. (2010)[b]	Quantitative	Large northeastern university	-BMI
Perez & Joiner (2003)[b]	Quantitative	University	N/A
Perez et al. (2002)[c]	Quantitative	University	-Acculturative stress -U.S. born parents (Hispanic)
Pope et al. (2014)[a]	Qualitative	Southeastern metropolitan area Maternal caregiver-adolescent girl (11–14 years) dyads	-Type of maternal caregiver -Marital status of caregiver -Maternal education
Poran (2002)[c]	Mixed Methods	New York City/New Jersey state college (17–42 years)	-Sexual orientation -SES
Poran (2006)[a]	Qualitative	New York City college	N/A
Pulvers et al. (2004)[a]	Quantitative	Community (public housing, urban health center) *M* (*SD*) age: 43.7 (16.6)	-Perceived weight status -BMI -Percentage body fat
Quick & Byrd-Bredbenner (2014)[c]	Quantitative	University	-BMI
Rakhkovskaya & Warren (2014)[c]	Quantitative	Large Nevada university	-Ethnic identity -Generational status -BMI
Rakhkovskaya & Warren (2016)[c]	Quantitative	Large southwestern university	-Ethnic identity -American identity -Generational status -Native language -BMI
Rodgers et al. (2019)[c]	Quantitative	Large urban university, racially/ethnically diverse high schools, local youth organizations *M* (*SD*) age: 18.43 (1.32)	N/A
Rogers Wood & Petrie (2010)[a]	Quantitative	Southeastern colleges/universities Mix of predominantly White and HBCUs	-Ethnic identity -Relationship status -Family income -BMI
Rothstein et al. (2017)[b]	Quantitative	Community *M* (*SD*) age: 29.03 (11.37)	-BMI
Watson, Ancis, White, and Nazari (2013)[a]	Quantitative	Large Southeastern university (18–60 years)	-Sexual orientation -Relationship status -Religious background -Family income -Racial identity attitudes -BMI
Webb et al. (2013)[b]	Mixed Methods	Urban southeastern state university	-BMI
Webb et al. (2014)[a]	Quantitative	Mix of state institution and private colleges Mix of predominantly White institutions and HBCUs	-Maternal education -BMI
White & Warren (2013)[c]	Quantitative	Large southwestern university	-BMI

Note. BMI = body mass index; SES = socioeconomic status; PWI = predominantly White institution; HBCU = historically Black colleges and universities
[a] Black sample only.
[b] Black/White comparisons.
[c] Multiple racial/ethnic comparisons

identifies as a White, Jewish, upper middle class cisgender female postdoctoral psychology fellow with experience in addressing multicultural issues in assessment and treatment of eating disorders and body image concerns across diverse populations and sociocultural contexts. The second, third, and fourth authors identify as White upper middle class cisgender female psychologists, with extensive experience in research on eating disorders and body image in culturally diverse populations. The senior author identifies as a Black cisgender upper middle class female clinical health psychologist with expertise in research promoting positive embodiment and well-being in culturally- and body-diverse groups. While our collective positionalities indeed contribute to the oversaturation of

White and upper middle class voices in body image research, our intention for this review is to both amplify existing Black female scholarship, as well as encourage further multicultural collaboration in future research. In the context of the recognition of historical importance of colonization of Black bodies and its far-reaching contemporary implications for systems of oppression, we also acknowledge our relationships to the land of the U.S. where this work was conducted, and our identities as previous or recent settlers.

2. Historical context of body image among Black women

2.1. History of colonization of Black female bodies

The marginalization and objectification of Black female bodies is rooted in a complex history of colonization, White supremacy, and patriarchy, in which enslaved Black women were repeatedly and systematically humiliated, violated, and dehumanized at the hands of White men and women (Benard, 2016; Strings, 2019). As such, Black female bodies were treated as objects that White men and women "possessed" and controlled, contributing to a social discourse that Black women's bodies existed solely to serve others (Benard, 2016; Strings, 2019). The most notable case of the objectification of Black female bodies is Saartjie Baartman (also known as the "Hottentot Venus"), an enslaved South African woman from the 19th century whose naked body was prominently displayed throughout London and Paris for possessing "exotic" body features (e.g., large buttocks, genitalia, and breasts).[2] While some scholars have criticized the overuse and oversimplification of Saartjie Baartman's case (Hobson, 2005; Nash, 2008), this example highlights how Black women's bodies continue to be uniquely objectified and exoticized through mainstream media (e.g., music videos, television, film, and pornography; Benard, 2016).

2.2. Controlling images and internalized narratives

Black feminist scholars have also examined how controlling images, or images that provide problematic caricatures or stereotypes of Black women, contribute to the marginalization and justify the invalidation and erasure of Black women's authentic embodied experiences throughout history. While the "Mammy" trope reinforces the belief that larger-bodied, darker-skinned women are unattractive and asexual (Collins, 2000; Collins, 2004; Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013; West, 1995), the "Jezebel" archetype contributes to the belief that slim, lighter-skinned women are more sexually attractive and socially valuable (Mowatt et al., 2013; West, 1995). Although both images reinforce racial, gendered, and socioeconomic hierarchies and reduce Black women to singular and inaccurate identities, such images also contribute to internalized narratives of how Black women are perceived in society, which can contribute to lower levels of self-esteem (Thomas, 2004) and sustained inequalities (Collins, 2000).

2.3. Opportunities for reclamation and activism

Conversely, increased acknowledgement and interrogation of these discourses can provide opportunities to shift such static images to richer and fuller narratives of reclamation and activism. Indeed, at the same time as these images serve to perpetuate systemic control and disciplining of Black bodies, as well as other

marginalized bodies as a means of exerting social control (Rinaldi, Carla Rice, Crystal Kotow & Lind, 2020), Black activism and other forms of active resistance provide a counter discourse, reclaiming Black and marginalized bodies and resisting these cultural forces (Cooper, 2016; Friedman, Rice, & Lind, 2020). These liberatory spaces contradict lenses of victimhood and position Black women as agentic even as they navigate strong opposing cultural forces. Taken together, this historical and political context sets the stage for understanding the ways in which Black women inhabit their bodies and their relationship to the gaze of others through a lens that highlights the structural and sociopolitical forces at play. While this review focuses on body image as an individual's subjective multifaceted experience of their body, this focus by no means seeks to minimize the role of broader sociocultural influences in shaping these experiences.

3. Extant research on body image among Black women

3.1. Gendered racism, colorism, and Black female body image

Black women continue to be exposed to a range of controlling and oppressive appearance-related discourse including hegemonic beauty standards that remain entrenched in both gendered racism (i.e., the simultaneous experience of sexism and racism; Essed, 1991) and colorism (i.e., oppression and discrimination based on skin color). Such standards contribute to conflicting narratives about Black female bodies, which can result in uniquely racialized body image concerns (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Dunn, Hood & Owens, 2019; Patton, 2006). Some research has found, for example, that Black women who experience stress from gendered racial microaggressions report negative body image (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014), lower self-body appreciation, and greater levels of appearance-contingent self-worth (i.e., self-worth is contingent on physical appearance; Dunn et al., 2019). Hypervigilance towards one's skin tone has also been found among Black women to be associated with body shame and skin tone dissatisfaction (Buchanan, Fischer, Tokar & Yoder, 2008; Harper & Choma, 2019).

Qualitative studies also highlight internalized narratives that lighter skin tones are viewed more favorably than darker skin tones (Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014), in addition to narratives that long, straight or wavy hair is more desirable than short or kinky hair (Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Patton, 2006; Pope et al., 2014). These messages are reinforced by countless examples of exoticization or discrimination of Black women's natural hair or skin tone (Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Patton, 2006), which can lead to engaging in expensive, painful, and potentially damaging straightening processes (e.g., heat styling, hair relaxers or perms) or skin bleaching (Harper & Choma, 2019). Such findings suggest that Black female body image is not only influenced by explicit experiences with gendered racism and colorism, but also by internalized beliefs about the perceived attractiveness and acceptance of one's skin tone and hair style/texture/color in mainstream cultures. Alternatively, these findings also present opportunities for Black women to respond to such damaging discourses by reclaiming and celebrating a wide range of hair styles/textures/colors and skin tone, such as the "Black is Beautiful" movement and diverse representation of Black women in mainstream media.

3.2. Comparative research on body image in Black women

Despite growing research on body image among Black girls and women, there are still mixed findings regarding how they uniquely develop and experience body dissatisfaction (Awad et al., 2020; Kashubeck-West et al., 2013). Some studies have focused exclusively on group comparisons between Black and White girls and women

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[2] Saartjie Baartman's body was objectified not only in life, but also after her death, when parts of her body were preserved and publicly displayed until 1974. Her body remained preserved in the museum with a cast of her body still on display. Her body was not returned to South Africa until 2002 after years of protests from Nelson Mandela.

(Fitzsimmons-Craft & Bardone-Cone, 2012; Javier, Moore, & Belgrave, 2016; Roberts, Cash, Feingold & Johnson, 2006), given that most validated theories and assessments of body dissatisfaction were developed with samples of predominantly White young women (Cassidy et al., 2015; Davis et al., 2010; Kashubeck-West et al., 2013). However, others have suggested that such methodology could be problematic, as such comparisons assume White experiences with body image as the reference point (Hughes, 2021; Kashubeck-West et al., 2013; Patton, 2006). Meta-analyses have shown that although Black women reported greater body satisfaction (*d* =0.28; Roberts et al., 2006) and lower levels of body dissatisfaction (*d* =0.29; Grabe & Hyde, 2006) than White women, smaller group differences emerged based on the type of assessment used in each study (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Roberts et al., 2006). However, given that these meta-analyses are now 15 years old, it is difficult to conclude that such findings are still relevant with more recent and complex assessments of body image.

Extending beyond the binary of comparisons between Black and White women, many studies have also examined how body image may differ between Black women and other women of color (e.g., Asian and Hispanic/Latina; Gordon, Castro, Sitnikov & Holm-Denoma, 2010; Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Quick & Byrd-Bredbenner, 2014; Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2016). Several studies suggest that Black women may be more protected from body dissatisfaction than Asian and Hispanic/Latina women, due to reporting higher levels of body satisfaction (Burke et al., 2021; Hernández et al., 2021) and fewer shape or weight concerns (Hernández et al., 2021; Quick & Byrd-Bredbenner, 2014; Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2016). However, it is unclear whether reported findings are a result of true group differences, related individual or environmental characteristics, the diversity of measurement approaches implemented, or inherent racial biases in the questionnaires.

3.3. Gaps in existing body image assessments

Research suggests that standardized measures of body dissatisfaction may not be accurate assessments of such constructs for Black women, as few have been specifically developed and validated for this population (Bond & Cash, 1992; Davis et al., 2010; Falconer & Neville, 2000; Pulvers et al., 2004). Most self-report measures of body dissatisfaction often reflect the desire to lose weight and portray larger bodies as undesirable. However, Black women generally report lower body dissatisfaction on most self-report questionnaires, despite having a higher average body mass index (BMI) than Asian, Hispanic/Latina, and White women (Quick & Byrd-Brenner, 2014; Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2016). Thus, such measures may not accurately assess body dissatisfaction in Black women. Several studies have attempted to address this issue by evaluating the psychometric properties of well-established measures of body dissatisfaction, including the Eating Disorders Inventory (EDI; Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983; Garner, 2004; re-evaluated by Franko et al., 2004; Kashubeck-West et al., 2013; Kelly, Mitchell, et al., 2012; Rothstein, Sbrocco, & Carter, 2017), Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q; Fairburn & Bèglin, 1994; re-evaluated by Bardone-Cone & Boyd, 2007; Burke et al., 2017; Kelly, Cotter, & Mazzeo, 2012), and Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ; Cash, 2000; re-evaluated by Kashubeck-West et al., 2013; Kelly, Mitchell, et al., 2012).

3.3.1. Eating Disorder Inventory

The EDI-Body Dissatisfaction (EDI-BD) subscale items ask participants whether certain body features (stomach, hips, thighs, buttocks) are either an appropriate size or too big/large. Research has shown, however, that Black women endorse larger buttocks (Overstreet, Quinn, & Agocha, 2010) and thick thighs (Hughes, 2021; Gentles-Peart, 2018) as desirable, and thus may experience body

dissatisfaction differently if they believe their body features are too small. While the EDI-BD subscale has demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Franko et al., 2004; Kashubeck-West et al., 2013; Kelly, Mitchell, et al., 2012) and convergent/discriminant validity (Kashubeck-West et al., 2013; Kelly, Mitchell, et al., 2012) among Black girls and women, it was still generally found to be a poor fit for the hypothesized factor structure for these populations (Franko et al., 2004; Kashubeck-West et al., 2013; Kelly, Mitchell, et al., 2012; Rothstein et al., 2017). For example, some found that items for the subscale seemed to load separately for positive and negative cognitions (Franko et al., 2004; Rothstein et al., 2017), as well as for stomach size vs. thighs, hips, and buttocks (Kashubeck-West et al., 2013), while others found that the subscale assessed different underlying constructs for Black and White women, with overall lower item endorsement for Black women (Kelly, Mitchell, et al., 2012). Such results suggest that the original subscale should be interpreted with caution and that subscale items should be analyzed differently for Black girls and women.

3.3.2. Eating Diorder Examination Questionnaire

The Weight Concerns (WC) and Shape Concerns (SC) subscales of the EDE-Q (Fairburn & Bèglin, 1994) also emphasize body dissatisfaction through the context of fear of weight gain or desire to lose weight. While Bardone-Cone & Boyd (2007) found that both subscales demonstrated adequate internal consistency and temporal reliability for Black female undergraduate students, scores were significantly lower on both subscales compared to their White peers (Bardone-Cone & Boyd, 2007). In contrast, Kelly, Cotter, & Mazzeo, 2012 found that, when compared to both a primarily White community sample and primarily White undergraduate sample, Black female undergraduate students reported similar mean scores for both subscales. However, the authors noted that nearly twice as many Black women endorsed clinically significant levels of weight concerns relative to primarily White undergraduate students, suggesting that clinical cutoff scores may differ for this population (Kelly, Cotter, & Mazzeo, 2012).

Such findings suggest that the WC and SC subscales of the EDE-Q should also be interpreted with caution for Black female undergraduate students, and that additional factors should be considered (e.g., racial composition of their environment, historical salience of heightened public health messaging surrounding the "obesity epidemic"; see Webb, Butler-Ajibade, & Robinson, 2014 for additional contextual considerations). More recently, however, in Black and White youth, a reduced 3-factor version of the EDE (i.e., a semi-structured interview with questions and subscales that parallel the EDE-Q) with a "body dissatisfaction" factor was found to be invariant, providing support for more similarities than differences in body dissatisfaction among Black and White youth (Burke et al., 2017). Thus, this modified version of the EDE-Q may be a promising tool for exploring body dissatisfaction among Black women in comparison to women of other racial backgrounds.

3.3.3. Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire

The Appearance Scales (AS) of the MBSRQ (Cash, 2000) provide a more comprehensive assessment of body image, including importance and evaluation of one's appearance, satisfaction with specific body parts, weight-related concerns, and self-perceptions of weight status. Although subscales have demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Kashubeck-West et al., 2013; Kelly, Mitchell, et al., 2012) and convergent/discriminant validity (Kashubeck-West et al., 2013) for Black women, several discrepancies were found with the factor structure. Specifically, the subscales were found to be a poor fit with the hypothesized factor structure, with distinct factors for appearance-focused items, weight concerns, and non-weight body satisfaction (Kashubeck-West et al., 2013). In addition, Kelly, Cotter, & Mazzeo, 2012 found that there were different underlying

constructs for Black and White women regarding evaluation of one's appearance. These findings again indicate that although the MBSRQ-AS is more comprehensive assessment of body image, it still should be interpreted with caution regarding how Black women evaluate their own appearance.

3.3.4. Other assessments of body dissatisfaction

Body image has also been assessed through figure rating scales (e.g., Pulvers et al., 2004; Stunkard, Sorenson, & Schlusinger, 1983), where discrepancies between their perceived current and ideal body sizes are calculated to determine body dissatisfaction. Such measures eliminate the possibility of presenting biased *language* around body size or shape and have been found to produce smaller effect sizes of racial differences between Black and White women than weight-related or comprehensive (e.g., including other aspects of body image) questionnaires (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Roberts et al., 2006). However, group differences remain, with Black women selecting larger body sizes for their personal ideals and ideals for their ethnic group compared to White or Latina women and yet less body dissatisfaction (Gordon et al., 2010; Perez & Joiner, 2003). While some have found that White women rated themselves as *larger* than their ethnic group's ideal and Black women rated themselves as *smaller* (Perez & Joiner, 2003), others have found no significant group differences among Black, White, and Latina women in selections of the mainstream U.S. ideal (i.e., "the United States mainstream culture's ideal body shape"; Gordon et al., 2010, p. 137). However, such findings also raise the question as to how to conceptualize "mainstream U.S. ideals", given that Black women living in the U.S., by definition, comprise part of the mainstream U.S. culture.

Webb et al. (2014) provided a more nuanced within-group approach by asking Black college-bound older adolescent females to select the body size of a typical ethnic group peer in addition to their personal ideal and ethnic group's ideal. Results revealed that on average participants' current body size was *larger* than their personal ideal and ethnic group's ideal but *smaller* than their peer's body size. Notably, the discrepancy between current body size and ethnic group's ideal was smaller than between current body size and personal ideal, which parallels previous findings from Gordon et al. (2010) and suggests that young women typically evaluate their own body size as closer to their ethnic group's ideal than to their own personal ideal (Webb et al., 2014). Such findings further stimulate the need to better clarify other factors and sociocultural contexts in which Black women are situated that may influence their personal body size ideals, as well as the potential protective influence on evaluation of body size in comparison to peers.

4. Sociocultural theories of the development of body dissatisfaction

Sociocultural theories posit that individuals are pressured by powerful social influences (e.g., peers, family, and media) to adhere to sociocultural standards of attractiveness (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Such pressures can lead individuals to internalize these standards and become dissatisfied with their bodies when they cannot attain them (Thompson et al., 1999; Thompson & Stice, 2001). The internalization of appearance ideals, or the personal investment in attaining appearance ideals promoted by various sociocultural sources, has been suggested to be a well-established mechanism through which societal pressures contribute to body dissatisfaction (Stice, 2002). Traditional media (e.g., film, television, and magazines) has been shown to be one of the most prominent sociocultural influences on body image concerns, as it often reflects societal ideals that are unattainable for most women (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008). Growing research also indicates that social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok) can have harmful effects on young women's body image, as women have been

found to compare themselves with unrealistic social media content and become dissatisfied with their own appearance when there are discrepancies (Fardouly, Pinkus, & Vartanian, 2017; Rodgers, Slater, Gordon, McLean, Jarman & Paxton, 2020; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019).

Research has also demonstrated the negative influence of internalization of appearance ideals on young women's body image (Schaefer et al., 2019; Thompson & Stice, 2001). Studies suggest that Black women are often exposed to a mix of messages about appearance ideals both mainstream (e.g., White or Eurocentric) and culturally-specific (e.g., Black or Afrocentric) (Hesse-Biber, Livingstone, Ramirez, Barko & Johnson, 2010; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011), and therefore may respond to each set of ideals differently. In fact, Black women have been found to often reference White appearance ideals as distinct from culturally-specific ideals, with White or Eurocentric features being perceived as more socially acceptable and attractive in mainstream cultures (Awad et al., 2015; Poran, 2002; Harper & Choma, 2019; Patton, 2006). Stronger internalization of White appearance ideals has also been found among Black women in the U.S. to be associated with higher hypervigilance toward one's skin tone and hair texture, as well as higher skin tone dissatisfaction and skin bleaching behaviors (Harper & Choma, 2019).

Qualitative research (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Poran, 2006) has found that Black women often feel misrepresented in mainstream media and that depictions of Black women still often reflect White standards of beauty (e.g., lighter skin, wavy/curly/long hair, thin, Eurocentric facial features) or present only extreme examples of the weight spectrum (e.g., extremely skinny or extremely overweight). Capodilupo (2015) found that Black women's body esteem and appearance satisfaction were negatively associated with internalization of media images reflecting Black women with lighter skin and long/straight hair. Other qualitative studies have highlighted Black women's frustrations that certain culturally-specific body features that have been previously mocked by mainstream society (e.g., large buttocks and full lips) are more recently appreciated in women of other racial backgrounds (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011), whereas other features continue to be criticized (e.g., natural hair) in professional environments or viewed as less attractive (e.g., broad nose) in mainstream media (Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014).

While it is unclear how such messages have directly impacted Black women's body image and self-esteem, these findings highlight the conflicting messages that Black women receive about their culturally-specific body features. As different forms of media become increasingly more abundant, accessible, and culturally diverse, research continues to investigate the distinct messages Black women receive and internalize about appearance ideals from the media (Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014), in addition to messages from peers, family members, and romantic partners that may not be reflected in mainstream media (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Hesse-Biber et al., 2010; Hunter, Kluck, Cobb-Sheehan & English, 2017; Pope et al., 2014). The following sections discuss two sociocultural theories that have been well-established in the literature and applied to understanding body dissatisfaction in Black women, social appearance comparison and thin-ideal internalization.

4.1. Social appearance comparison

Social appearance comparison is the first mechanism posited by sociocultural theories to account for the detrimental effects of appearance ideals and their media representations on body dissatisfaction. Social comparison theory asserts that when individuals are unable to objectively evaluate themselves, they often compare themselves to others whom they view as most similar (Festinger, 1954). Research has applied this theory to body image concerns, positing that individuals will compare their appearance to others

whom they perceive to represent attainable goals (Fardouly et al., 2017; Myers & Crowther, 2009). When discrepancies are observed, particularly through upward comparisons in which the individuals perceive others as more attractive, they will experience increased body dissatisfaction and negative mood (Fardouly et al., 2017; Myers & Crowther, 2009). Studies consistently demonstrate associations between social appearance comparisons and body dissatisfaction across various contexts, including traditional media, social media, and in-person interactions (Fardouly et al., 2017; Myers & Crowther, 2009).

Researchers have argued, however, that Black women may be less likely to compare themselves to media images of White women because they perceive themselves as less similar to such images (Frisby, 2004; DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010). Studies have found, for example, exposure to idealized images of White women produced minimal effects on Black women's body dissatisfaction and body esteem (DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010; Frisby, 2004), regardless of whether such images reflect "ideal" (i.e., "the female body that is reflected in the media as 'perfect'"; DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010, p. 706) or "average" (i.e., "the average 'real American woman'"; DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010, p. 706) physiques. However, Black women with low body esteem reported a negative impact when they were exposed to idealized images of Black women (Frisby, 2004), suggesting that they may be more likely to internalize ideals and develop body dissatisfaction when comparing themselves to media images that they perceive as more similar and attainable.

Such findings may also differ for younger populations, particularly in relation to how adolescents' sociocultural environments may influence how they engage in social comparisons with mainstream media images and peers. For instance, it is possible that Black girls who are immersed in predominantly White environments emphasizing mainstream ideals may be more likely to internalize such ideals and develop body dissatisfaction, due to seeing themselves as dissimilar or unable to attain such ideals. On the other hand, it is also possible that Black girls interacting in predominantly Black environments may be more likely to compare themselves to their peers and feel dissatisfied due to discrepancies that they perceive as more modifiable. Unfortunately, there is still a dearth of empirical research that specifically examines how engagement in social comparisons with media images of both Black and White women may relate to body dissatisfaction and internalization of appearance ideals in Black women, particularly among younger Black girls who are exposed to distinct cultural environments, and even less is known about how Black women and girls compare themselves with media images of women of other racial backgrounds (e.g., Asian, Hispanic/Latina).

4.2. Thin-ideal internalization

The second mechanism to explain body dissatisfaction through a sociocultural framework is thin-ideal internalization, or the personal investment in attaining a thin body (Thompson & Stice, 2001). While appearance ideals are multi-faceted, for women in the United States and other Western countries, the emphasis is often disproportionately on thinness and leanness. Most of the empirical work to date has focused on the pursuit of these characteristics which are typically referred to as the thin-ideal (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Both prospective and experimental studies consistently demonstrate that thin-ideal internalization predicts increases in body dissatisfaction for women whose cultures value thinness and leanness (Stice, 2002; Stice, Gau, Rohde & Shaw, 2017). Some research suggests, however, that thin-ideal internalization is culturally bound and may be less relevant to some women of color (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2001; Warren & Akoury, 2020). It has been suggested that Black women may not internalize such standards and, in fact, generally report lower levels of thin-ideal

internalization (Burke et al., 2021; Quick & Byrd-Bredbenner, 2014; Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2016; White & Warren, 2013) and drive for thinness (Gordon et al., 2010; Kelly, Mitchell, et al., 2012; Rothstein et al., 2017) compared to Asian, Hispanic/Latina, and White women.

Such findings suggest that Black women may be protected from internalizing mainstream appearance ideals that emphasize thin bodies as desirable. However, perhaps not surprisingly, both thin-ideal internalization and drive for thinness are still found to be significantly associated with body dissatisfaction (Gordon et al., 2010; Rogers Wood & Petrie, 2010) and shape/weight concerns (Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2014; Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2016) for Black women. Such results demonstrate that, although Black women may endorse lower levels of thin-ideal internalization and drive for thinness, both are still prominent risk factors for body dissatisfaction for this population. However, the question remains why some Black women appear to be more protected from internalizing the thin-ideal and becoming dissatisfied with their bodies, while others are not.

Gilbert et al. (2009) found that, among Black women of diverse ethnic backgrounds, the relationship between thin-ideal internalization and disordered eating was only significant among African American women, compared to African or Afro-Caribbean women. Such findings suggest that the relationship between thin-ideal internalization and disordered eating may be stronger among African American women than for other women of African descent; however, limited research on ethnic comparisons among Black women make it difficult to generalize these findings. O'Garo et al. (2020) found that, among Jamaican undergraduate students, those with higher self-esteem were at lower risk for internalizing the thin-ideal while those with lower self-esteem were at a higher risk. Such results suggest that self-esteem may be an individual protective factor against thin-ideal internalization. However, it is also important to consider other potential cultural factors that may influence how Black women respond to messages promoting the thin-ideal, such as pride about their Afrocentric features and the potential rejection of such messages in reaction to the promotion of Eurocentric beauty standards.

It is also worth noting that while perhaps measures of thin-ideal internalization effectively identify body dissatisfaction in Black women who internalize the thin-ideal, they may also be missing important aspects of body image that are specific to Black women's experiences. The Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ; Schaefer et al., 2015; Thompson, van den Berg, Roehrig, Guarda, & Heinberg, 2004) is a well-established measure to assess beliefs about appearance and internalization of appearance ideals. While some have found that subscales demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Burke et al., 2021; Kashubeck-West et al., 2013) and convergent/discriminant validity for Black women (Kashubeck-West et al., 2013), subscales were generally found to be a poor fit for the hypothesized factor structure (Burke et al., 2021; Burnette, Boutté, Sosnowski & Mazzeo, 2020; Kashubeck-West et al., 2013). Specifically, Kashubeck-West and colleagues (2013) found that only some items of the SATAQ-3 loaded appropriately with the original subscales, while other items related to emulation of media figures seemed to load separately. Burnette et al. (2020) found that one item of the SATAQ-4 related to thin-ideal internalization loaded differently for Black women compared to White women, suggesting that the item may have been interpreted differently between these groups. Lastly, Burke et al. (2021) found that Black women differed from women of other racial/ethnic backgrounds (Asian, Latina, and White) in model fit for measurement models of the SATAQ-4 subscales. Taken together, findings suggest that, similar to self-report measures of body dissatisfaction, measures of thin-ideal internalization should be interpreted with caution for Black women and that measures emphasizing other appearance ideals may be more relevant for this population.

5. Internalization of other appearance ideals

5.1. Internalization of curvy/hourglass ideal

While most research on appearance ideals tend to emphasize the importance of a slender and lean body, Black women have been found to also describe their ideal as curvaceous and feminine (Davis et al., 2010; Hughes, 2021; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Overstreet et al., 2010). Recent studies have found that the curvy/hourglass body ideal is becoming more prevalent across women of diverse racial backgrounds (Hernández et al., 2021; Hunter, Kluck, Cobb-Sheehan, & English, 2017; Hunter, Kluck, Ramon, Ruff, & Dario, 2021). Although some have shown that women of different racial backgrounds (Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White) report similar levels of internalization of the hourglass ideal (Hernández et al., 2021), other research has found that Black women endorsed larger curvy ideals than White women (Hunter, Kluck, Ramon, Ruff, & Dario, 2021; Overstreet, Quinn, & Agocha, 2010). Overstreet et al. (2010) also found that while Black women endorsed a larger buttocks size and average body size as ideal, White women identified a smaller buttocks size and underweight body size as ideal (Overstreet et al., 2010). Although such research again overgeneralizes binary racial comparisons, these findings suggest that the curvy/hourglass ideal may be more salient for Black women than the mainstream thin-ideal.

While some suggest that internalization of the curvy/hourglass ideal is perhaps a protective factor against body dissatisfaction (Hunter, Kluck, Ramon, Ruff, & Dario, 2021; Overstreet, Quinn, & Agocha, 2010), others have indicated that this ideal is still unrealistic for most women to attain and may lead to other harmful behaviors (e.g., buttock/breast enhancements, rib removal) to attain this ideal (Hernández et al., 2021). Some research indicates that Black women receive dual messages from their families emphasizing both a curvy ideal and a thin ideal, suggesting an internalization of contradictory messages that is often referred to as a "Coke-bottle figure" (Hunter et al., 2017). It has also been suggested that media representations portraying Black women as naturally curvaceous can lead to increased body dissatisfaction among Black women with less or excessive curves (Hughes, 2021). It can therefore be argued that while internalization of a curvy/hourglass ideal may protect Black women from body dissatisfaction if they already embody this ideal, such internalization may place others at increased risk of body dissatisfaction if they do not.

5.2. Internalization of toned/muscular ideal

Research has also identified toned/muscular physiques as ideal among Black women (Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo, 2015), suggesting that this ideal may be more relevant to this population than the thin-ideal. The toned/muscular ideal is becoming more commonly examined as a potential warning sign for body dissatisfaction, with increased efforts to assess drive for muscularity and internalization of toned/muscular ideals among women of diverse racial backgrounds (McCreary, 2007; Rodgers, Franko, Lovering, Luk, Pernal & Matsumoto, 2018; Schaefer et al., 2015). However, most research on the toned/muscular ideal among Black women is either qualitative (e.g., Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo, 2015) or does not provide distinct quantitative findings for different racial groups (McCreary, 2007; Rodgers et al., 2018; Schaefer et al., 2015). Hernández et al. (2021) found no significant group differences in internalization of the muscular ideal among Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White women, with positive correlations between muscular-ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction for the entire sample. Such findings suggest that the toned/muscular ideal is not only more universally accepted by women of diverse racial backgrounds, but also that

internalization of such ideals may be an important risk factor of body dissatisfaction among Black women that warrants further examination.

5.3. Culturally-specific components of body image and appearance ideals

Research also suggests that in addition to shape and weight concerns, Black women also define attractiveness more comprehensively or holistically, including facial features, clothing, skin tone/complexion, hair style/texture/color, overall appearance, and personality (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Davis et al., 2010; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Patton, 2006). Burgeoning research has attempted to assess body ideals and body dissatisfaction through more comprehensive assessments of body image (e.g., Broad Conceptualization of Beauty Scale, Tylka & Iannantuono, 2016; MBSRQ, Cash, 1994), as well as more complex figure rating scales (e.g., Davis et al., 2010; Hunter, Kluck, Ramon, Ruff, & Dario, 2021; Pulvers et al., 2004; Webb, Warren-Findlow, Chou & Adams, 2013). While some attempted to incorporate more nuanced body ideals (e.g., Hunter, Kluck, Ramon, Ruff, & Dario, 2021), others focused on developing figure rating scales that are more racially ambiguous (i.e., figures with ethnically-neutral hair and facial characteristics; Pulvers et al., 2004) or diverse (i.e., including both Black and White silhouettes, extending range of body sizes, dressed in business suits vs. standard bathing suits; Davis et al., 2010). However, it is still difficult for such measures to adequately reflect culturally-specific features (e.g., skin tone/complexion, hair style/texture/color, facial features) that are also salient components of body image and appearance ideals for Black women.

Other studies attempted to modify existing measures of thin-ideal internalization to reflect more culturally-specific items, such as replacing items that referenced the thin-ideal to statements about skin color, hair, and other facial features (Capodilupo, 2015; Harper & Choma, 2019). Capodilupo (2015) utilized the Physical Appearance Discrepancy Questionnaire (PADQ; Altabe, 1996), which provided Black women with the opportunity to list their own ideal features and rate the level of importance for each. Not surprisingly, findings indicated a blend of ideals, including long/straight hair, lighter skin, clear/smooth skin, bigger buttocks, and bigger breasts (Capodilupo, 2015). These findings demonstrate the value of open-ended forms of body image assessment, as well as the importance of including a wide range of appearance ideals for this population. Unfortunately, there is limited peer-reviewed research utilizing measures that reflect racial aspects of body image (e.g., Skin Color Questionnaire, Bond & Cash, 1992; Skin Color Satisfaction Scale, Falconer & Neville, 2000), as well as research on other theoretical frameworks that may bridge existing gaps in understanding body image and appearance ideals among Black women.

6. Culturally-sensitive theoretical frameworks

Recent studies have investigated the potential influences of ethnic/racial identity formation and acculturative stress, as well as applied critical race theory and intersectionality theory to understand through a multicultural lens the unique ways in which Black women may experience body dissatisfaction and internalization of appearance ideals. These efforts are particularly timely and also responsive to the growing diversity reflected in the Black American population, including the increasing number of multiracial individuals living in the U.S. For example, census data show that the percentage of individuals identifying as both Black and White has risen dramatically by 134% in the decade spanning 2000–2010 (Jones & Bullock, 2013). Relatedly, recent Pew Research Center data indicated that the proportion of individuals self-identifying solely as Black or African American has declined from 93% in 2000 to 87% in

2019 (Tamir, 2021). Therefore, a closer examination of the complex nuances of self-identification among women in the Black community in the context of body image is deemed essential to advancing this line of scholarship forward.

6.1. Ethnic/racial identity

Studies have yielded mixed results regarding the role of ethnic/racial identity on body image and thin-ideal internalization among Black women. Some have found that among Black female undergraduates, strong ethnic identity was negatively associated with thin-ideal internalization (Cotter, Kelly, Mitchell & Mazzeo, 2015; Rogers Wood & Petrie, 2010) and shape/weight concerns (Cotter et al., 2015; Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2016), and positively associated with body satisfaction (Rogers Wood & Petrie, 2010) and appearance evaluation (Cotter et al., 2015). Other studies reported, however, that ethnic identity was not significantly associated with thin-ideal internalization or weight concerns (Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2014), as well as body appreciation or appearance-contingent self-worth (Dunn et al., 2019). Although most studies did not report the racial composition of each university setting (see Table 1 for study characteristics), such mixed findings suggest that the influence of ethnic/racial identity on Black women's body image is complex and uniquely situated within distinct sociocultural contexts.

Awad et al. (2020) found, for example, that among Black female undergraduates in a predominantly White, public university, higher racial self-hatred was related to greater body dissatisfaction, while higher enculturation (i.e., connection to Black/African American culture) was associated with higher overweight preoccupation. However, other measures of ethnic/racial identity (e.g., anti-White attitudes, internalized Afrocentricity, and multiculturally inclusive attitudes) were not found to be significantly associated with either body image measure (Awad et al., 2020). In contrast, Watson et al. (2013) found that among Black female undergraduates (for which details of the racial composition on campus were not provided), high multiculturally inclusive attitudes buffered the relationship between sexually objectifying experiences and thin-ideal internalization, and higher thin-ideal internalization was associated with higher body surveillance, body shame, and appearance anxiety. Cotter et al. (2015) also found that among Black female undergraduates at a large, urban university (52% White, 19% Black), thin-ideal internalization mediated the relationship between ethnic identity and shape/weight concerns. Rogers Wood and Petrie (2010) found that among Black female undergraduates from two predominantly White institutions and three historically Black institutions, although strong ethnic identity was negatively associated with thin-ideal internalization, the more messages and pressures they received emphasizing mainstream ideals, the more they internalized such ideals and indicated body image concerns. Such findings suggest that although stronger ethnic identity may be protective against thin-ideal internalization and body dissatisfaction, the distinct messages and pressures Black women receive from their environments may pose additional risks for body image concerns and internalization of appearance ideals.

6.2. Acculturative stress

Acculturative stress, or the stress associated with adapting to a new culture, has also been shown to be particularly deleterious to body image and self-esteem for Black women and other women of color (Gordon et al., 2010; Kroon Van Diest, Tartakovsky, Stachon, Pettit & Perez, 2014; Perez, Volez, Pettit & Joiner, 2002). Some studies have shown that higher acculturative stress is associated with higher body dissatisfaction (Kroon Van Diest et al., 2014) and drive for thinness (Kroon Van Diest et al., 2014; Gordon et al., 2010) among Black women. Perez et al. (2002) also found that among a combined sample of Black and Latina women, body dissatisfaction was associated with disordered eating only for those with high levels of acculturative stress. While such findings suggest that acculturative stress may be an important risk factor, there are limited studies that specifically examine the role of acculturative stress on body image concerns among Black women. Furthermore, research is also lacking regarding potential protective factors against acculturative stress (e.g., strong ethnic/racial identity and social supports from family and peers) that may, in turn, protect Black women from related body image concerns.

6.3. Assessment of environmental factors

Although growing research has given attention to individual ethnic/racial identity and adjustment toward or away from mainstream culture, few studies summarizing Black women's experiences with body image provide details of the environmental contexts in which such identities are established. Kelch-Oliver and Ancis (2011) noted that Black female graduate students referenced their community and college/university environments (e.g., growing up with or going to school with primarily White or Black peers, attending predominantly White or historically Black institutions) as significant external influences on their body image. Hesse-Biber et al. (2010) found that Black women's body image is influenced by a variety of environmental factors, including their family's racial identity, school/neighborhood environments, and peer groups. Specifically, Black female college students in a predominantly White college who either identified primarily with Black culture or who did not ascribe to one specific racial identity (White, Black, or both) appeared to be more protected from internalizing White/mainstream ideals and reported higher body esteem, body satisfaction, and self-confidence (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). In contrast, those who identified primarily with White culture or with both cultures reported more body image concerns, particularly in response to feeling invalidated by peers of a particular racial group. Such findings highlight the potential influence of not only one's individual ethnic/racial identity on body image concerns, but also of the sociocultural environments in which such identities were developed.

6.4. Critical race theory, intersectionality theory, and body image

Emerging research has also applied critical race theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings, 2009) and intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000) to better understand Black women's experiences with body image from a multicultural and multifaceted perspective. While CRT emphasizes the overarching importance of addressing race and racial inequalities that uniquely impact Black women's experiences in mainstream culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009), intersectionality theory extends to addressing how distinct social identities (e.g., class, race, weight status, gender identity, and sexual orientation) are mutually shaped and treated within powerful and oppressive structures (Cole, 2009; Rice, Harrison, & Friedman, 2019). With roots in Black feminist thought, intersectionality theory emphasizes an understanding of not only how different social identities intersect, but also how multiple dimensions of power, privilege, and oppression are positioned among all social groups (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Rice et al., 2019). Intersectionality-informed research thus departs from merely categorizing experiences based on singular or additive social identities and, instead, invites the opportunity to reassess such experiences are compounded within the intersection of such identities and the powerful social systems in which they are positioned (Cole, 2009; Rice et al., 2019). While several scholars have addressed the need of approaching research at both the micro and macro levels (Cole, 2009; Burke, Schaefer, Hazzard & Rodgers, 2020; Rice et al., 2019), the appropriate methodology to do so is frequently debated (Rice et al., 2019).

Growing evidence has demonstrated, for example, that individuals who hold several marginalized identities, referred to as "multiply marginalized," are at increased risk for body image concerns (Austin, Nelson, Birkett, Calzo & Everett, 2013; Burke et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2019). From this perspective, it can be argued that Black women may experience increased risks for body image concerns due to not only holding multiply marginalized identities as both Black and female, but also their experiences of gendered racism that are uniquely harmful to body image (Essed, 1991; Watson et al., 2019). Such conclusions, however, present an incomplete picture, as there is failure to acknowledge and interrogate the historical and structural contexts in which such experiences are shaped and maintained. Unfortunately, contextualized analyses of Black women's experiences with body image is often lacking in quantitative research, with oversimplified conclusions that neglect the maintaining systems of oppression, discrimination, and power in which these intersecting identities are marginalized (Burke, Schaefer, Hazzard, Rodgers, 2020; Cole, 2009; Rice et al., 2019). While such contexts are indeed more difficult to assess through objective measures and statistical analyses, other methodologies (e.g., semi-structured interviews, case studies, discourse analyses, and narrative methods) provide a richer and more complex understanding of how Black women experience body image within their broader systems (Rice et al., 2019).

Key to consider is whether risks of body image concerns are further compounded by other marginalized social identities that may contribute to body dissatisfaction, including lower socioeconomic status, gender/sexual minority status, and higher weight status. Research suggests, for example, that socioeconomic variables (e.g., level of education, income, wealth) may account for racial differences in BMI (Insaf, Shaw, Yucel, Chasan-Taber & Strogatz, 2014). Given that Black women are disproportionately the target of weight stigma and bias (Strings, 2015; Strings, 2019), it is important to consider how experiences of discrimination or microaggressions related to class and weight status may influence body image concerns for this population. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research examining the interactive influences of such identities, as many studies continue to treat demographic information as isolated or singular variables (Burke et al., 2020). Although more recent scholarship has begun to examine the potential influence of intersecting social identities on body dissatisfaction, particularly with gender and race/ethnicity (see Burke et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2019 for reviews), there is still a gap in the literature regarding how to incorporate other intersecting marginalized social identities that may contribute to or protect from body dissatisfaction among Black women. Furthermore, despite best efforts to apply intersectionality-informed research to answer these questions, most studies fail to acknowledge and challenge the oppressive structures that reinforce such marginalization, which may inadvertently contribute to oversimplifications of the systemic problems.

Strings (2019) specifically highlights the racist origins of the westernized fear of fat (i.e., "fat phobia"), providing countless examples of how women with darker skin and larger bodies, particularly Black women, were perceived as both aesthetically and physically inferior to White women throughout the history of Western countries. While Strings (2019) underscores how fat phobia is inherently racist and gendered, she also draws attention to how fat Black women continue to be perceived as "at-risk" or problematic in medical settings and related media outlets (Strings, 2015; Strings, 2019). Such narratives not only reduce fat Black women's healthcare experiences to blame and doubt, attributing higher weight status and related health concerns to perceived laziness (Strings, 2015; Strings, 2019), but also prevents opportunities from systemic changes to occur within medicine and larger society. As medical research reinforces the discourse of Black women having "'dangerously' high BMIs" (Strings, 2015, p. 120), more research is needed to counter this discourse and shift the problem away from the individual and onto the broader systems that contribute to fat-phobic, sexist, and racist practices (Strings, 2015).

7. Future directions in research, assessment, and intervention

7.1. Future directions in research

While there have been several promising developments in research on Black women's body image over the past two decades, there is still a dearth of culturally-sensitive approaches to understand how the internalization of blended appearance ideals uniquely contributes to body image concerns for this population. Researchers should continue to examine body dissatisfaction in Black women through qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand body image concerns that are both culturally-specific and situated in distinct environmental contexts. Investigators should continue to conduct focus groups and interviews to provide Black women with the opportunity to share their experiences of body dissatisfaction in ways that may not be captured using only existing quantitative measures. In addition, future research might examine messages about appearance ideals for Black women through content analyses of both mainstream and culturally-specific media outlets. Further empirical research evaluating the impact of media images on Black women's body image is also warranted. Specifically, continued efforts should be made to examine the effects of exposure to both Black and White media images, as well as media images of other women of color with a broader range of skin color, body size, hairstyle, and facial features.

In addition, future research should also continue to examine body image and appearance ideals in younger and older Black populations to explore potential changes across the lifespan. Given that young Black girls already begin to receive messages about their bodies as early as elementary school (Katz, Gordon-Larsen, Bentley, Kelsey, Shields & Ammerman, 2004) and already begin to receive racialized messages about their bodies (e.g., messages about hair texture, skin color, and facial features; Pope et al., 2014), it is important that research continue to unpack the effects such messages on self-esteem and body image. While there has been some research on body image concerns among younger Black girls (Franko et al., 2004; Webb et al., 2014), there is no research to date that specifically examines body image among older Black women. Longitudinal data on Black women across developmental contexts would also clarify whether Black women are at increased risk for body image concerns when they are younger (e.g., during childhood or adolescence), college-aged, or in adulthood. Similarly, more research is needed on body image of Black males across the developmental lifespan, as there is even less known about internalized appearance ideals and body image concerns among young Black boys and older Black men.

Furthermore, although there have been mixed findings regarding the influence of ethnic/racial identity on body image and internalization of appearance ideals, future research should continue to explore the potential influence of environmental factors that may impact identity formation and self-esteem among younger Black female adolescents. Exploring other dimensions of identity that may influence Black women's body image, including (but not limited to) race, ethnicity, immigration status, country of origin, ethnic identity, acculturation, acculturative stress, gender identity, sexual orientation, weight status, ability, and socioeconomic status would be of value (Burke et al., 2020). Intersectionality-informed research is particularly recommended to not only explore how distinct marginalized social identities may contribute to body image concerns and other forms of psychological distress, but also examine how such identities can be celebrated and bolstered against gendered, racist, and fat-phobic systems. Such knowledge would not only provide a more comprehensive understanding of risk factors related

to body dissatisfaction, but also identify protective factors related to intersecting social identities that may inform future efforts to prevent body dissatisfaction for younger generations.

7.2. Future directions in assessment

Additional research is needed to explore whether Black women are, in fact, experiencing lower levels of body dissatisfaction than women of other racial/ethnic backgrounds, or if the measures themselves are racially-biased (Kelly, Mitchell, et al., 2012; Kelly, Cotter, & Mazzeo, 2012; Rothstein, Sbrocco, & Carter, 2017). Body image researchers should consider utilizing alternative subscales of well-established measures that are suggested to be more relevant for Black girls and women (e.g., Burke et al., 2017; Franko et al., 2004; Kashubeck-West et al., 2013). Given that most validation studies continue to be conducted within university settings (Rodgers & Franko, 2015; Rodgers et al., 2019), additional efforts should also be made to examine the validity of such measures for Black women in both community and clinical settings, as well as in younger and older populations, to determine whether these measures are, in fact, appropriate assessments of body dissatisfaction across environmental and developmental contexts.

Further research is also warranted to investigate the potential utility of measures that capture a broader spectrum of appearance ideals, including the potential influences of drive for muscularity and internalization of toned/muscular ideals and whether internalization of the curvy/hourglass ideal serves as a protective factor or contributes to increased risk. Measures that have already been developed to examine such constructs (e.g., Hernández et al., 2021; Hunter, Kluck, Ramon, Ruff, & Dario, 2021; McCreary, 2007; Rodgers et al., 2018) should be studied among Black girls and women in community and clinical samples to determine the utility of such assessments across developmental and environmental contexts. Research should also continue to develop and utilize more culturally-sensitive assessments of body image that extend beyond shape or weight (e.g., Altabe, 1996; Bond & Cash, 1992; Davis et al., 2010; Falconer & Neville, 2000), particularly culturally-specific body features that receive mixed acceptance from mainstream cultures and cannot be easily modified without harmful procedures, such as skin lightening/bleaching, hair relaxers, cosmetic surgery (Harper & Choma, 2019). Assessments of body image should also incorporate a range of appearance ideals, rather than focusing on a singular ideal. In addition, new assessments of appearance ideals and body image should be rigorously evaluated by experts in the field who are knowledgeable about Black female body image and intersectionality-informed research, as well as by members of the Black community, to minimize potential iatrogenic harm in scale development due to biases and assumptions from researchers of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

7.3. Future directions in intervention

In tandem with culturally-sensitive assessment and research, efforts should be made to improve early identification of warning signs of body image concerns among Black girls and women in schools, medical settings, and other broader communities. Specifically, efforts should be made in schools to incorporate more culturally-relevant information in health class curriculum on eating disorders and body image concerns that contradicts the inaccurate narrative that such concerns only apply to White, affluent, and thin-bodied girls. Health educators and school counselors should also receive specialized training in culturally-sensitive assessment of body image concerns to improve efforts in identifying warning signs in Black female students and other students of color. Lastly, schools

should provide opportunities in health classes for students to engage in discussions about both the sociocultural and racialized messages they receive about appearance ideals, as well as exercises to challenge such messages through cognitive dissonance and media literacy.

Efforts should also be made to increase knowledge among both medical and mental health professionals to identify culturally-specific warning signs of body dissatisfaction for Black girls and women (e.g., social comparison against White or Eurocentric ideals and negative evaluation of one's skin tone, hair, and facial features). Mental health professionals should receive specialized training in culturally-sensitive assessment and strategies to address body image concerns among Black women across the developmental spectrum, as well as reflect on their own biases and assumptions that inadvertently reflect their own internalized messages about appearance ideals. In addition, mental health professionals should address body image concerns through a multicultural and intersectional approach, in which Black female clients/patients are provided the space to reflect on the messages they have internalized about the mix of White/Eurocentric and Black/Afrocentric appearance ideals from family, peers, romantic partners, and the media.

Lastly, medical professionals should receive specialized education not only in early warning signs of body dissatisfaction among Black girls and women, but also in the harmful effects of stigmatizing or pathologizing larger bodies with "obesity prevention" interventions, which disproportionately target this population (Fitzgibbon, Tussing-Humphreys, Porter, Martin, Odoms-Young & Sharp, 2012; Strings, 2015; Strings, 2019). While there has been increased attention to the harmful effects of weight bias and weight stigma more generally (e.g., Pearl, 2018), it is imperative that future efforts are made to increase awareness in the medical field of the detrimental effects of weight bias and weight stigma and that medical professionals reflect on personal biases and assumptions that may inadvertently affect patients. Although several efforts have already been made to increase both public and professional awareness through social media campaigns and awareness weeks (e.g., National Eating Disorders Awareness Week), there is often still a disconnect between research findings and dissemination of relevant interventions (Austin, 2016). Such divides can lead to inadvertent weight bias or weight stigmatization in interventions posturing larger bodies as unhealthy and undesirable, thus contributing to body shame and body dissatisfaction (Pearl, 2018). Such efforts will not only raise both professional and community awareness that body dissatisfaction affects Black girls and women through a variety of sociocultural and intersectional pathways, but may also decrease weight stigmatization.

8. Concluding remarks

This paper highlights the importance of utilizing a culturally-sensitive and intersectionality-informed approach in research and assessment of body image concerns and internalization of appearance ideals for Black women. Although there have been positive directions, peer-reviewed research utilizing comprehensive measures of body dissatisfaction and internalization of appearance ideals that are more culturally-specific to Black women is lacking. While the proposals for future directions put forth in this paper certainly do not deconstruct decades of research rooted in cultural biases and institutional racism, our hope is to encourage researchers to improve current efforts in understanding and assessing body image concerns through various sociocultural frameworks to ultimately develop more culturally-sensitive interventions for a population that remains underserved.

Declaration of Competing Interest

Acknowledgments

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