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The Relationships between Fat Stereotypes, Body Surveillance, Physical Appearance Comparisons, and Body Dissatisfaction in Normal Weight Women: A Mediated Moderation Model, Study 1

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The first aim of this study was to examine the moderating effect of body surveillance on the relationship between fat stereotype endorsement and body dissatisfaction in normal weight women. Undergraduate participants (N = 400) completed online measures of fat stereotyping, body surveillance, and body dissatisfaction. Analyses first were conducted on the full ethnically heterogeneous sample, and then were repeated on a Caucasian-only subsample. As expected based on previous research, fat stereotyping did not significantly predict body dissatisfaction in either analysis. Further, body surveillance did not moderate the relationship between fat stereotypes and body dissatisfaction in the full sample. However, Caucasian participants (N = 301) had differing results. Body surveillance significantly moderated the relationship between fat stereotyping and body dissatisfaction in this group. Specifically, greater endorsement of fat stereotypes predicted greater body dissatisfaction in Caucasian women with lower body surveillance. Conversely, fat stereotypes were not significantly related to body dissatisfaction in Caucasian women with higher body surveillance. These results suggest that for Caucasian women who do not regularly monitor their body, endorsing fat stereotypes is harmful to their body satisfaction. Given that this finding was unique to the Caucasian-only subsample, these results provide further support that the relationships between body image and weight stigma continue to be impacted by race and ethnicity.

The second aim of this study was to examine downward physical appearance comparison as an explanation for this moderated effect. Downward physical appearance comparison refers to comparing oneself to people who are perceived as less attractive, often including individuals considered to be overweight or obese. It was expected that this comparison would be the mechanism through which the interaction between fat stereotype endorsement and body surveillance impacted body dissatisfaction. For both the full ethnically heterogeneous sample and the Caucasian-only subsample, this predicted effect was not supported. The interaction did not significantly predict downward appearance comparison, nor did the latter significantly predict body dissatisfaction.