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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 2

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The first aim of this study was to examine the causal role of fat stereotype endorsement on body dissatisfaction. We investigated how this relationship differed in normal weight women depending on their level of body surveillance. The level of fat stereotype endorsement was experimentally manipulated by presenting information that either supported or challenged common fat stereotypes through mock health reports. To support fat stereotypes, participants were presented with information about the controllable causes of excess weight (e.g., diet, exercise, etc.). To challenge fat stereotypes, participants were presented with information about the uncontrollable causes of excess weight (e.g., genetics, food-rich environment, etc.). It was expected that body surveillance would moderate the impact of study condition (support vs. challenge) on body dissatisfaction.

The second aim of the study was to assess whether downward physical appearance comparison mediated this moderation 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 predicted that the interaction between study condition and body surveillance would have an indirect effect on body dissatisfaction through downward physical appearance comparison.

Undergraduate participants ( $N = 269$ ) completed an online measure of body surveillance. They then were randomly assigned to either the support or the challenge condition and read the respective mock health report, as described above. Participants then completed online measures of body dissatisfaction, downward physical appearance comparison, and fat stereotyping. Given the well-documented differences in body image and weight-based stigma across various racial and ethnic groups, analyses were conducted on both the full ethnically heterogeneous sample, and then repeated on a Caucasian-only subsample.

As expected, body surveillance did not moderate the relationship between fat stereotypes and body dissatisfaction in the full sample. In the Caucasian sample ( $N = 190$ ), however, women with lower body surveillance reported higher body dissatisfaction in the challenge condition compared to those in the support condition. In contrast, women with higher body surveillance did not differ in their reports of body dissatisfaction depending on study condition. These results indicate that for Caucasian normal weight women with greater body surveillance, their higher levels of body dissatisfaction are not impacted by information that either supports or challenges fat stereotypes. This suggests that their body appraisals are resistant to change based on weight-related information. For Caucasian women with lower body surveillance, however, presenting information that supports fat stereotypes appears to reduce body dissatisfaction compared to information that challenges fat stereotypes. For these normal weight women who are less critical of their body, it is possible that information about the controllable causes of excess weight improves their body satisfaction by suggesting that they are engaging in appropriate weight-related behaviours.

Finally, for both the full ethnically heterogeneous sample and the Caucasian-only subsample, downward physical appearance comparison did not mediate the interaction between study condition and body surveillance. Thus, downward physical appearance comparison was not the mechanism through which the observed interaction impacted body dissatisfaction.