

CROSS-CULTURAL-GENERATIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF IDEAL BODY IMAGE: HISPANIC WOMEN AND MAGAZINE STANDARDS

By Donnalyn Pompper and Jesica Koenig

This study expands social comparison theory by examining magazine use along dimensions of gender, age, and ethnicity. Perceptions of magazines' idealized body image standards among two generations of Hispanic women were gathered using the focus group and telephone interview methods. Findings suggest that respondent groups aged 18-35 and those 36 and older both compare their body image to magazine standards, but behavioral effects vary. Two significant patterns are discussed: (1) assimilated magazine standards, and (2) dissonance in homogenization. This is the first study to explore cross-cultural-generational perceptions of mediated body image among Hispanic women using the stated research methods.



"Ideal body image" is a multidimensional construct characterized by perceptions of, attitudes toward, and values about the body.¹ Simply stated, body image is the way a person perceives weight, body size, and appearance. While the literature is rich in studies of perception formation in terms of mass media effects, little research has addressed relationships among ideal body image, magazine standards, and body satisfaction across ethnicity and age dimensions. The current study examines ideal body image standards among two generations of Hispanic female magazine readers.²

For better or worse, magazine-use behaviors are gender specific, with women attending more to body weight and shape messages because they are less satisfied with their bodies.³ Women seek magazines for fashion trends, dating advice, diets, exercise techniques, and low-fat meal options. "Women's magazines" are those whose content is primarily women's fashion and style. Overall, such magazines overvalue a thin body image as the acceptable standard for female appearance and the primary formula for a happy life.⁴

In the extreme, this content may influence obsessive behaviors. Unhealthful practices such as alcohol and steroid use have been linked to mass media messages, as have a growing number of eating disorders among college women and adolescent girls who integrate mediated images of a thin body ideal.⁵ Eight million people suffer from eating

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disorders in the United States, and 90% are women.⁶ Some clinical studies have discovered a solid link between women's magazines and eating disorders.⁷ Hence, magazines set the standards for women's ideal body image and may inadvertently influence harmful practices. Unhealthy behavior, particularly the "drive for thinness," is defined as an excessive concern with dieting, preoccupation with weight, and fear of weight gain. The EDI-2 instrument, the standard in assessment of eating disorders cited in hundreds of research and clinical articles, is used to reveal psychological features common in anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.⁸

Sheldon, Stevens, and Tucker described three categories still regarded as traditional body builds: ectomorph, mesomorph, and endomorph.⁹ The term "thin" or "skinny" describes an ectomorphic build characterized by a lean body type, small muscles, and a fast metabolism. The terms "thin" and "skinny" are used interchangeably. A mesomorphic body type is a muscular/athletic build with large bone structure and innate strength. A "large" body refers to an endomorphic build, a soft round body with under-developed muscles, associated with weight loss difficulty. The term "toned" refers to an ecto-meso, a lean, lithe, and agile body that is long and slim, yet somewhat muscular.¹⁰

The current study addresses under-examined demographic variables among this literature. While scholars have studied the relationship between magazine readership and ideal body image perception among Anglo women, very few have examined relationships among media use, eating concerns, ethnicity, and age. Eating behavior studies that have examined ethnicity suggest that Caucasian female college students display greater levels of disordered eating behaviors and attitudes and body dissatisfaction than their African American and Asian American counterparts.¹¹

What we know about Hispanic women's perceptions of body image is inconclusive and inconsistent. Some assume that women of color are impervious to Anglo women's beauty standards.¹² Several studies suggest that Hispanic women are more preoccupied/less satisfied with their bodies than both Anglo and African American women and that eating disorders and use of diuretics are most prevalent among female Hispanic adolescents.¹³ On the other hand, it has been suggested that Hispanics' ideal body image may be heavier than their Anglo counterparts' because they tend to be *less* concerned with weight.¹⁴ A study of Hispanic women ages 18-24 found that Anglo and Latina respondents reported similar levels of body dissatisfaction after exposure to mediated images of thin women, but that Latinas could resist the mediated ideal more than could Anglo women.¹⁵ Although Goodman found Latina respondents more accepting of a healthy-looking, larger, curvier figure, they concurred with Anglo respondents that being thin was the acceptable social standard to attract men, gain economic success, and maintain self-control.¹⁶ Examining a racially diverse group of patients recovering from substance abuse, a clinical study suggested that eating disorders commonly occur in poor and minority groups.¹⁷

The literature also reveals method-bound limitations. Very few respondents in clinical or social science studies of Latinas and body

image were older than 25. Because many of the most widely circulated fashion magazines target women beyond their teens and twenties, and because eating disorders can occur throughout the lifespan,¹⁸ the current study incorporated perceptions of Hispanic women through age 59. Furthermore, survey methods have been relied upon almost exclusively, even though women of color seem to favor collective testimonies and group settings to discuss these issues.¹⁹ This study used the telephone interview and focus group methods.

Finally, ethnicity variables have not been examined in a social comparison theory (SCT) context. While the literature suggests that Anglo women tend to compare themselves to mediated ideals, this theory has yet to be tested across generations of Hispanic women.

Media Effects and SCT. A major psychological process underlying media effects is social learning through observation and imitation.²⁰ Furthermore, mass media may cultivate beliefs and expectations about the real world.²¹ Social comparison theory (SCT) was developed to explain group uniformity pressures and feelings of uncertainty associated with comparing individual perceptions and behaviors to idealized, mediated standards.²²

Researchers have refined and extended SCT to describe the relationship between women and their body image perceptions.²³ When women compare themselves to images in fashion magazines, for instance, they confirm the importance of being skinny and become motivated toward achieving thinness.²⁴ After repeated exposure to a mediated ideal body image, SCT predicts, women may do whatever it takes to mirror those body images. For example, SCT was used to evaluate high school girls' perceptions of ideal body image in the media: the two are inextricably linked.²⁵ In ethnicity comparisons of young women's eating behaviors, it has been suggested that White women may display significantly greater body dissatisfaction and eating disorders than their Black and Asian American counterparts.²⁶ Consequently, SCT may suggest that women of various ethnicities respond uniquely to media.

Magazines & Health. Sociocultural and psychological factors underlie Americans' intense preoccupation with the body, and media have been blamed for encouraging unhealthful behaviors.²⁷ Standards of beauty and thinness unachievable for the majority of women have been linked to thinness depicting and promoting media that may influence eating disorder symptoms.²⁸ Mediated images have become the standard rather than the exception, thus contributing to anorexics' beliefs they are overweight when they are *not*, according to medical standards.²⁹ Many U.S. consumer magazines target specific gender groups because marketers promote and market gender-specific products. In fact, this niche is on the rise.³⁰ Women's magazines' editorial pages tend to focus more attention on health issues involving dieting, weight loss, exercise, and nutrition than on serious health problems such as cancer, heart disease, and drug abuse.³¹ Thus, mass media tend to underscore appearance and social belongingness over personal health.

Literature Review

A rich body of scholarship has examined images in women's magazines.³² Beginning in the 1920s, magazine covers promoted the "ideal girl," an "asexual-looking" woman who was "flat-chested, skinny, and hipless, with awkwardly long legs and arms."³³ A magazine's cover is its greatest sales-generating attribute, and publishers devote considerable resources to cover images.³⁴ Today, fashion magazine covers, ads, and editorial content imply that losing weight or changing body shape leads to a better life and that being thin means being happier, sexier, and more loveable.³⁵ Scholars describe magazines as "both economically driven business enterprises and culturally fueled vehicles of social mediation."³⁶

Historically, the cultural ideal for women's body size has remained thin, perhaps growing even thinner over time.³⁷ From 1991 to 1995, the number of weight and shape articles for women increased in fashion and health magazines.³⁸ Women's magazines contain more body-oriented messages of thinness and shapeliness than magazines targeting men,³⁹ and women's magazine content contained 10.5 times more weight loss messages than did men's periodicals—the same ratio of eating disorders among men and women in the general population.⁴⁰ In comparison to other media, such as television, attention to magazines may be a more consistent predictor of this effect.⁴¹ A positive correlation also has been found between teenage use of weight control practices and readership of women's health and fitness magazines.⁴² Abrahamson and his colleagues concluded that magazines continue to reflect sociocultural reality of American society.⁴³ Thus, magazines may propagate a slender ideal that, at best, elicits women's dissatisfaction with their own bodies and, at worst, influences unhealthful behaviors.

Hispanic Women and Body Image. According to the 2000 Census, nearly one in eight people in the United States is of Hispanic origin.⁴⁴ Hispanics are one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the United States, representing 12% of the population at 32.8 million. Women comprise one of the largest subgroups in this U.S. Hispanic population—especially those of Mexican (5.7 million), Puerto Rican (1.1 million), and Cuban (485,000) origins.⁴⁵ With such a large Hispanic population, Spanish-language broadcast and print media have grown significantly.⁴⁶

However, Latino/Latinas may be the most underrepresented minority group in non-Spanish language mass media, accounting for only 4.7% of the human models pictured in magazines.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it has been suggested that Latina magazines serve an assimilationist function by promoting unrealistic ideals found in general-market women's magazines.⁴⁸ In sharp contrast, editors of *Latina*, a bilingual middle-class-audience Hispanic women's magazine, suggested that the Hispanic community traditionally has seen nothing wrong with a larger body, that many Latinas grew up thinking "skinny" is synonymous with "ugly," and that Hispanic culture offers a unique ideal of femininity.⁴⁹

A study of eating behaviors and attitudes found more eating disorder symptoms and body dissatisfaction in Spain than in Mexico.⁵⁰ In the United States, age and degree of acculturation stress seem to impact significantly a Latina's eating behaviors and attitudes. Binge eating symptoms have been identified as most severe among Hispanic

women,⁵¹ and Chamorro and Flores-Ortiz found that second-generation Mexican American women feel particularly stressed about weight.⁵² According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 32% of teenage Hispanic students consider themselves overweight.⁵³ In comparison to their Anglo counterparts, more Hispanic female adolescents responded positively to the statement, "I am terrified of gaining weight."⁵⁴ Similar research findings suggest that Hispanic women are less satisfied with their bodies and more likely than Caucasian and African American women to consider themselves overweight.⁵⁵

Conversely, some Hispanic females have been less concerned with weight than Anglos and more likely to believe Americans are too concerned about losing weight.⁵⁶ Exclusive or primary use of the Spanish language in the home has been associated with lower scores on the Eating Attitudes Test, the most widely used standardized measure to identify symptoms and concerns of eating disorders.⁵⁷ Similarly, Latinas born outside the United States who immigrated at 17 years or older tend to select a larger silhouette as their ideal body image.⁵⁸ These findings suggest that identification with certain cultural practices may serve as a significant mitigating factor in the predisposition and development of eating disorders among Hispanic women.

Indeed, research examining Hispanic female body image is contradictory and limited. Most studies focus primarily on Hispanic college subjects and neglect Hispanic women over age 35. The current study explored how two generations of Hispanic women perceive ideal body image in relation to magazine standards. Three research questions were posed:

RQ1: How do Hispanic women regard magazine standards of ideal body image?

RQ2: How might Hispanic women's perceptions of ideal body image change over time?

RQ3: What role might language and culture play in setting standards for Hispanic women's perceptions of ideal body image?

Focus groups and telephone interviews were conducted to examine body image perceptions. Both methods provide rich, qualitative data that facilitate opinion-sharing and in-depth responses. Focus groups were conducted to examine perceptions of female subjects ages 18-35 (Generation X), while telephone interviews were used to study participants age 36 and over (Baby Boomers, or BBs). The term "generation" refers to the average span of time between the birth of parents and that of their offspring and comprises a body of living beings that represent a single step in the line of descent from an ancestor.⁵⁹ Thus, the youngest age in Generation X was doubled to represent the youngest age among BBs. Respondents were residents of Florida or attended a Florida university. With 2.2 million Hispanic residents, Florida ranks among this ethnic group's largest population centers in the United States.⁶⁰

Method

The focus group respondents of Generation X were systematically recruited from a listing of all Hispanic students attending a Florida university, as well as a Hispanic Honor Society and a Latin American Literature class. Focus groups were conducted (four meetings for a total of seventeen participants) between November 2002 and February 2003 until little new information was obtained, an approach consistent with the goal of theoretical saturation necessary to obtain relevant information.⁶¹ Each focus group lasted about one hour and a half. Refreshments were served, but no financial incentives were offered. Data were derived from fifty-two pages of transcribed audiotape recordings and were categorized into patterns/trends. To minimize bias, a Hispanic female graduate student who was unfamiliar with the study analyzed responses in addition to the researchers.

The telephone interview method was used to analyze perceptions of ideal body image among BBs, women over the age of 35. Women's responsibilities increase with age, thereby limiting time available to participate in research studies.⁶² Ten female Hispanic Florida residents were recruited using a snowball sampling technique and the mother of a Generation X participant for the seed telephone number. BBs participated in twenty-minute phone interviews during February and March 2003. Data for analysis consisted of twenty-three pages of transcribed audiotape recordings. Responses were analyzed by the researchers and a Hispanic female academic representative of this age group.

Also, both generations were presented seven photographs of women and asked to comment on how such images relate to their perceptions of ideal body image. Consistent with an earlier study of cultural expectations of female body image involving photographs of Miss America Pageant contestants and *Playboy* centerfolds,⁶³ the current study used photographs from both editorial and advertising content from November to December 2002 issues of widely circulated magazines that appeal to both Generation X and BBs, including *People en Espanol* to ensure images of Hispanic ethnicity. Images were selected to offer a variety of female body types: figures 1 and 2—extremely thin (ectomorphs), 3 and 4—thin (ectomorphs) yet shapely/curvy, 5—toned/muscular (ectomeso), and 6 and 7—large/big-boned or overweight (endomorphs). Respondents completed a questionnaire providing demographic information, ethnic background, magazine use, and ideal body image.

Findings

The typical Generation X respondent was 21.5 years of age, was a student at a Florida university, was born in the United States, spoke English most frequently in the home, and had at least one parent and one set of grandparents born in a Spanish-language country (See Table 1). Among non-U.S.-born respondents in Generation X (29%), all but one migrated to the United States before the age of 5. The age range of participants was 19-29.

The typical telephone interview respondent was 48.4 years old; was a resident of Florida; was born in Cuba, Puerto Rico, or Colombia; did not migrate to the United States until after the age of 5; spoke English and Spanish with equal frequency in the home; and had at least

TABLE 1
Demographic View of Hispanic Focus Group and Phone Interview Participants

	# Participants	Birth Location			Mean Age	Ethnicity				Language Spoken Most Frequently in Home		
		U.S.	Spanish-speaking country	Other*		Cuban	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Other**	English	Spanish	English & Spanish
Generation X	17	12	4	1	21.5	3	3	4	7	14	3	0
Baby Boomers (BB)	10	3	7	0	48.4	5	1	1	3	4	2	4
Totals	27	15	11	1	—	8	4	5	10	18	5	4

* Respondent was born in St. Croix, Virgin Islands.

** Respondents who characterized their ethnicity as "Other," linked their heritages to: Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, and Spain.

one parent and one set of grandparents born outside the United States. Actual age range of BBs was 38-59.

RQ1: How do Hispanic women regard magazine standards of ideal body image?

Generation X respondents reported reading fashion magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *People*, and *InStyle* most frequently (several times per month) with about one-fourth reading them weekly. BBs read magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Home & Garden* most regularly: once per month or less. Fashion magazines were their favorites when they were in high school and in college, especially the Spanish-language *Vanidades*.

Generation X. This group reported that magazine images make them weight conscious and emphasize that women must be skinny and attractive in order to be socially accepted and to satisfy men. A 20-year-old explained: "Magazines expose us to almost the only image there is so you're always comparing to that." Another (age 19) said: "Most of them are tall, thin, and have that perfect body we all are supposed to strive for...that's where I get my opinions from." Said a 20-year-old: "The women in magazines reflect society's ideal body image and mine." These results mirror an earlier study of college-age women⁶⁴ that also identified perceptions that men embrace mediated body image ideals and want wives and girlfriends to reflect them.

There were exceptions, however. On average, one respondent in each focus group meeting defined the ideal female in terms of character and *inner* beauty. One (age 19) stated that women should be "shaped like women and not like stick figures." Clearly in the minority, a few said that images of perfection presented in fashion magazines were simply unattainable and that images' features were airbrushed or computer-enhanced.

BBs. Women agreed that "thin is in," but most characterized excessively thin ideal body image standards as *unrealistic*. A 43-year-old respondent said that magazines' standards equate body image with success in life: "If you're not slim and trim and toned, you're not going to be very successful." One (age 58) stated, "Magazines create reality for people and we accept [it]." A 38-year-old said the magazine standard is "White, tall, blonde, skinny." Another 58-year-old participant said: "The realization is that the real good-looking women are the skinny women...if you want to dress and look well, being thin is the perfect thing to be." Said a 59-year-old: "I think the media is making everybody look skinny...everybody's skinny-boned—like anorexic." Only one BB disagreed that a thin body image is ideal: "We, being Latin, don't feel that Anglo-looking women are the acceptable image. We're very proud. If anything, we feel we're the right look. We're the ones that think curvy hips are the right thing."

On the whole, both generations agreed that women portrayed in magazines set society's standard for ideal body image—but BBs rationalized that the ideal is impractical.

RQ2: How might Hispanic women's perceptions of ideal body image standards change over time?

Consistent with Goodman's⁶⁵ findings about Anglo and Latina college-age women's body image perceptions, our findings suggest that Hispanic women of Generation X and BBs both hold "thin," "toned, yet skinny muscles" as the ideal body image.

Generation X. Hispanic women ages 18-35 reported preoccupation with body image and weight, stressing the importance of physical appearance and daily routines that focus on diet and exercise regimens, including unhealthful practices. One (age 19) explained: "[Body image] is what's more important and you do *whatever you have to do* to get there...to get flat abs, big boobs, boob job...to get that immediate reaction." Most admitted having restricted their daily calories to 1,200 or less at some point and to using multiple weight-loss techniques such as taking laxatives, intentional vomiting, compulsive exercise, and eating cessation for weight control. Stated a 19-year-old: "I think health takes a back seat to the immediate, thin body image by any means necessary. You achieve being skinny, and then you worry about the health."

Shown magazine photographs, all Generation X respondents chose thin or toned women to represent the body image they would most like to emulate. Although several thought the skinniest woman was "too thin," most agreed they would not mind *being* that skinny themselves. Though they admired the confidence displayed by the largest body images, they concurred that a "full figure" is socially unacceptable. A 20-year-old said: "They could be the ideal women for the Lane Bryant line or as Plus Size models, but never in just a normal magazine."

Asked why achieving a thin body image is so important, focus group participants explained that they are still searching for intimate partners and feel pressured to fit certain physical characteristics associated with thinness. More than half suggested that age influences behav-

iors associated with actually maintaining a thin, ideal body image. Generation X respondents predicted that women (not necessarily themselves) become less preoccupied with weight and more comfortable with their body size as they age. One 20-year-old respondent said: "Most women who are 40 and older have already found their husband, have already had their children, ...Part of searching is being prepared to catch their [men's] eye, which is also about being in shape." Another added: "I'd probably still want to be healthy but I'd let real life take over." Another 19-year-old explained: "You're still going to care about what you look like . . . [but] you don't have to impress anyone. You're already married." These women also want to be thin because they soon will graduate from college and feel pressure to look their best when competing for a job. A 21-year-old explained: "I need to get on the ball and lose weight...I want to be a contender."

BBs. By contrast, these women emphasized the health and personal well-being over maintaining a thin body but, given the choice, would prefer to emulate a thin body image. Clearly, BBs' shift in priorities means less preoccupation with consciously maintaining magazine standards for ideal body image than their Generation X counterparts. They attribute the attitude shift to aging and maturity associated with directing time and energy to family, career, and personal growth. These findings are consistent with Trent's⁶⁶ proposition that women aged 40 and over "find it is necessary to concentrate on beauty from within and to co-operate helpfully with nature." A 58-year-old explained: "Although you admire beautiful women and you wouldn't mind having stayed that way, your energy is directed to other more important essential things in life." A 43-year-old admitted that her ideal body image perceptions have changed over the years: "My main goal is just to be healthy." Furthermore, respondents said that women in their teens and twenties are dissatisfied with their own bodies and are *overly* preoccupied with body image and weight, much more so than their generation. According to a 49-year-old respondent: "They are always striving to look like the little Barbie doll."

Ironically, however, more than half of BBs identified the skinniest or toned women as being "the most ideal" when presented with images from magazines. The other half indicated that they *would have* chosen one of the skinniest images if asked twenty or thirty years ago to pick the ideal. A 49-year-old captured this sentiment: "When I was in my younger age, the ideal thing was being really, really, skinny." Thus, women confessed that they still would like to fit society's ideal of thinness, but no longer actively strive to achieve it. A 58-year-old explained: "I still aspire to look [thin] but I guess as you get older in life...superfluous and frivolous things are really just set aside...That's the good thing about being 50 and older, you don't give a damn what people think of you." Said another 58-year-old: "You have to set priorities in life and as I've grown older you have to narrow down your focus. To me, it is more important to cultivate my mind and my pocketbook than it is to worry about how I look."

Nevertheless, there was a slightly greater tolerance among this age group for images of larger women. A 38-year-old said: "Any of the

women could be the prototype for the ideal body image...I was always raised as what is in your head is more important than what was on it."

Hence, findings suggest that Hispanic women ages 18-35 are preoccupied with weight and strive to achieve a thin ideal body image with little regard for their health while those over 35 are less preoccupied with body image and more concerned with being healthy.

RQ3: What role might language and culture play in setting standards for Hispanic women's perceptions of ideal body image?

Cultural Factors. All respondents identified a direct link between culture (i.e., language, food, customs, and traditions) and body image. The overall consensus was that Anglos prefer people to be "really skinny" while the Latin culture is more accepting and respectful of larger women's bodies. Some respondents attributed this difference to traditional customs because it is considered rude by some not to eat at family gatherings. According to one respondent (age 58), "Your customs and morality are determined by your ethnicity, your tradition, and the food that you eat."

The majority of respondents who were fluent in both English and Spanish and had been exposed to magazines printed in both languages perceived Spanish-language magazines as more accepting of a "full-figure" body image, a finding consistent with an earlier study of Latinas' comparison of Spanish-language and English-language magazines.⁶⁷ While English-language magazines were perceived as promoting "anorexic-like" models, Spanish-language magazines were perceived as endorsing health and shape while being more tolerant of voluptuous, curvy women. A 59-year-old explained: "It's very subtle but I think it is different...Hispanic magazines go for more of the health aspect, not so much being skinny." A 23-year-old said: "The messages conveyed in Latina magazines are very different than American magazines. In Latina magazines they're very adamant about be who you are, embrace your culture, and let your culture be seen by the people around you."

Ironically, however, respondents of both Generation X and BBs preferred English-language to Spanish-language magazines. While inability to read and speak Spanish fluently accounted for several respondents' preference for English-language magazines, many explained that Spanish-language magazines were not nearly as accessible in the United States.

Family Values. Although magazines were cited as the most influential sources for body image ideals, *family values* were a close second. Many Generation X respondents felt their parents "push" them to be thin and that their mothers are dissatisfied with their daughters' weight or appearance. "Growing up, I was never skinny enough for her," said a 20-year-old. Parents may be the source of cognitive dissonance among Generation X respondents by stressing the importance of eating and being healthy *and* being thin. One participant (age 21) admitted: "I work out to lose weight...it comes from the family. My mom has always made it an issue for me to look good. When I see myself gaining weight the first

person I think of is my mother...you just don't want to hear [her say], 'Ay Dios mio.'" Thus, mothers' conflicting messages seem to engender body dissatisfaction among women ages 18-35.

In sum, magazines seem to serve a social comparison function for Hispanic women, with age influencing behavior but not necessarily perception. A thin body image ideal is the standard, and women aged 35 and under most actively strive to *achieve* this ideal by whatever means necessary. Given lack of Spanish-language fluency among Generation X, English-language magazines may be more influential than the Spanish-language magazines perceived as more tolerant of "full-figure" body images. Rodriguez posited that market researchers use language to differentiate socio-economic class among Hispanics and that many adopt English as their first language as a sign of a higher class.⁶⁸ Also, some Generation X Latinas experience cognitive dissonance as a result of family values.

This study explored how women's magazines serve a social comparison function for ideal body image standards for Hispanic women of two generations. Two significant patterns were identified through focus group and phone interview data: (1) assimilated magazine standards, and (2) dissonance in homogenization.

Assimilated Magazine Standards. Hispanic women—age notwithstanding—cited magazines as a primary definer of "thin" being the most socially acceptable body image, lending support to Kitch's⁶⁹ developing theory of magazines as standard bearers for "the ideal woman." Furthermore, magazines targeting women 40 and older have been said to replicate the same kinds of unattainable ideals long presented to younger audiences: fear of aging rather than its celebration as promoted by advertisers through editorial influence.⁷⁰ The current study's findings affirm that perceptions of magazines' standard of thinness is unaffected by age.

Even though emulating the ideal no longer preoccupies BBs' behaviors, evidence suggests that mothers reinforce upon their daughters standards of thin body image associated with social acceptance and attractiveness. Perhaps BBs did not experience such effects to the degree reported by Generation X because their mothers were not as educated or fully acculturated. As first-generation mothers, BBs may use their own experiences to navigate their daughters toward successful marriages and careers. Hence, a revered role model's corroboration of commercially driven values is cause for concern.

Dissonance in Homogenization: Intersecting dimensions of language, culture, and body image offer fertile ground for communication studies, particularly when behaviors prove inconsistent with one's cultural heritage and/or reflect untraditional socio-economic values. Cultural theorists long have warned of homogenization's downside, a loss of cultural heritage. Generation X respondents who were born in the United States or had migrated before the age of five tended to identify with images of Anglo women and to prefer English-language magazines. The repercussions of conforming to Anglo standards are being amplified in popular culture, such as the 2002 feature film "Real Women Have

Discussion

Curves" that features a young "overweight" Latina who resists her mother's command to lose weight.

While many Hispanic parents orient themselves with a cultural heritage beyond U.S. borders, their children attend more to the culture in which they find themselves.⁷¹ Many young Hispanic women absorb American cultural ideals of beauty, significantly altering their body image ideal. Furthermore, with so few Hispanic role models in U.S. media, young Hispanic women look to English-language magazines and popular American culture to identify body image standards.⁷² Latinas of Generation X often adopt standards conveyed by English-language magazines filled with images of thin women. They compare their physical appearance to magazines' stylized portrayals and strive to achieve that image in order to fit into American society. Surely, attempts to conform to English-language magazines' representations of the "ideal" body image and U.S. social standards, while clinging to a cultural heritage that focuses on food and dining, creates a major conflict for Latinas living in the United States who in their everyday lives negotiate between two cultures.

Furthermore, an "integrative force of consumerism for producing assimilated Americans"⁷³ homogenizes Hispanics and Anglos, as evidenced in this study's discovery of a powerful drive to compete for a mate and for a job and the *need* to be thin in order to be successful. Even though women tend to overestimate male preferences for thin female figures,⁷⁴ Generation X Latinas studied here explained that they are surrounded by other college women competing for the same pool of available mates. Also, Hispanic women of both generations emphasized the importance of personal appearance in competing for employment that will determine their socio-economic status.

While these findings offer a foundation for further hypothesis testing in the area of cross-cultural-generational body image research, data gathering limitations must be considered. First, both researchers are Anglo females. Second, because all respondents were either university students or women employed in white-collar professions, education levels of this sample may be above average. Findings among varied socio-economic strata may reveal different results. Also, a longitudinal study of Hispanic women would be beneficial in determining whether their perceptions of ideal body image actually change over time. Furthermore, it would be helpful to examine diversity *among* Hispanic women living in the United States and those residing in a variety of Spanish-language countries. Finally, further inquiry is needed to explain the paradox of Latinas' preference for thinness despite *Latina* magazine's recognition of the Hispanic community's traditional association of "skinny" with "ugly," as well as the handful of magazines published for larger women.

NOTES

1. Thomas F. Cash and Timothy A. Brown, "Gender and Body Images: Stereotypes and Realities," *Sex Roles* 21 (September 1989): 361-

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2. The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino/a" are used interchangeably throughout this study to describe a U.S. resident who self-identifies with a heritage rooted in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central America, or South America. Similarly, the terms "Caucasian" and "Anglo" also are used interchangeably. Although we use such terms, we agree with cultural theorists' position that "Latinos do not comprise even a relatively homogenous ethnicity." See Juan Flores, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1993), 199.

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