

Ideal weight varies across cultures, but body image dissatisfaction pervades

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Different cultures have different standards and norms for appropriate body size and shape, which can effect how children perceive their body image. Some cultures celebrate a fuller body shape more than others, but researchers at the Center for Obesity Research and Education (CORE) at Temple University have found that an overweight or obese child can still be unhappy with his or her body, despite acceptance from within their ethnic group.

“This unhappiness is yet another consequence of childhood obesity,” said Gary Foster, Ph.D., director of CORE and president-elect of the North American Association for the Study of Obesity. “These data illustrate when treating overweight children, it’s important to attend the psychological consequences that excess weight confers, no matter what the ethnic group.”

Researchers looked at data collected from 1,200 fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-graders in 10 Philadelphia schools to determine the level of satisfaction each student had with his or her body image. After students answered a questionnaire to determine how satisfied they were with their bodies, the data were analyzed, taking into account race/ethnicity, gender and weight.

The findings will be presented at The North American Association for the Study of Obesity’s 2007 Annual Scientific Meeting in New Orleans on Oct. 23. Among them: While obese and overweight children of all ethnicities were unsatisfied with their body image, Asian children had

the highest levels of dissatisfaction among all ethnic groups tested.

“Culturally speaking, the ideal body shape is a lean one among Asian children,” said Foster. “In African-American and Latino cultures, being lean is not always the ideal.”

Most current studies on body image look at perceptions across one or two groups, mainly among Caucasians and African-Americans. But Foster noted that this study provides a rich sampling for a better understanding of how body image is perceived across different ethnic backgrounds.

Source: Temple University

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