

## Relations Between Body Image and Dieting Behaviors: An Examination of Gender Differences

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Although links between body image and dieting behaviors have been established among women, little research is available to elucidate relations between these constructs among men. In the present study, we examined relations between men's and women's body image and healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors. Two hundred and eight participants' (104 men, mean age = 25.88 years; 104 women, mean age = 23.87 years) body perceptions and body satisfaction were assessed using the Contour Drawing Rating Scale. Participants' dieting behaviors were assessed using the Weight Control Behavior Scale and weight status was assessed using body mass index (BMI). Analyses of relations among BMI, body satisfaction, and healthy dieting behaviors revealed a predictable pattern for both men and women; BMI was inversely related to body satisfaction and was positively related to healthy dieting behaviors. Body satisfaction was inversely related to both men's and women's healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors. Further analyses of the relations between men's and women's body image and unhealthy dieting behaviors suggest different motives for men's and women's participation in these potentially health-compromising weight-management techniques. Results are discussed in terms of their contribution to researchers' understanding of the gendered nature of body image and dieting behaviors.

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**KEY WORDS:** body image; dieting; body satisfaction; men; women.

Body dissatisfaction and dieting behaviors are conceptualized as normative among adolescent girls and women. However, little research is available to elucidate associations between body image and dieting behaviors among men. An understanding of body image among both men and women is important given reports of the prevalence of people affected by body dissatisfaction and the psychological distress associated with body dissatisfaction (Cash & Henry, 1995; Casper & Offer, 1990; Friedman & Brownell, 1995; Greenfield, Quinlan, Harding, Glass, & Bliss, 1987; Smolak & Levine, 2001). An understanding of

the predictors of dieting behaviors is critical in light of research that indicates the ineffectiveness of dieting and the negative health consequences associated with unhealthy dieting approaches (e.g., Neumark-Sztainer, Sherwood, French, & Jeffery, 1999). In the present study, we examined relations between men's and women's body image and healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors.

Although dieting may be advisable for some individuals, a startling proportion of dieters is normal or underweight by medical standards and does not need to lose weight (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 1999). Individuals (especially women) who are dissatisfied with their bodies and unnecessarily concerned with their weight are vulnerable to participation in unhealthy dieting behaviors including fasting, bingeing, and purging (Goodrick, Poston, & Foreyt, 1996; Kostanski & Gullone, 1999; Stice & Agras, 1998), which have been linked to the development of eating

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disorders (Patton, Johnson-Sabine, Wood, Mann, & Wakeling, 1990). Even though obesity rates are on the rise, and the deleterious effects of obesity are well documented (CDC, 2004), data suggest that it is not appropriate for many people to be concerned about their weight, and it is unlikely that the large portion of people who are dieting at any given time actually need to lose weight (Serdula et al., 1993). Research also suggests that weight-loss efforts may backfire; dieting is often associated with weight gain rather than weight loss, which may prompt more drastic (i.e., unhealthy) weight loss efforts, disordered eating, and even obesity (Stice, Cameron, Killen, Hayward, & Taylor, 1999). Dieting and weight cycling may also have a negative impact on individuals' general mental health (e.g., depression and self-esteem; Brownell & Rodin, 1994; Friedman & Brownell, 1995; Lowe, 1993; Rosen, Gross, & Vara, 1987; Rosen, Tacy, & Howell, 1990).

### **Body Image and Dieting Behaviors Among Women**

Studies of girls as young as 5 years old indicate that body image is associated with weight status, such that heavier girls are less satisfied with their bodies than are slender girls (Davison, Markey, & Birch, 2000; Smolak, 2003). By adolescence, the majority of girls, regardless of weight status, report concerns about their weight (Rolland, Farnhill, & Griffiths, 1996, 1997; Shapiro, Newcomb, & Loeb, 1997). These concerns about body and weight issues do not subside from childhood to early adulthood but instead appear to intensify with age (Cash & Henry, 1995; Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1986; Smolak & Levine, 2001).

The pervasiveness of body dissatisfaction and weight-related concerns among women is often referred to as a "normative discontent" (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985), and dieting is a typical response to this discontent. Approximately 75% of adolescent girls report preoccupation with their weight and report dieting (Casper & Offer, 1990) and 70–90% of women report being on a diet at any given time (Serdula et al., 1993). However, it remains somewhat unclear what elements of body dissatisfaction prompt women to participate in dieting behaviors. Although many factors may motivate women to diet, in this study, we examined whether women who diet perceive themselves as heavier than other women perceive themselves or desire to be thinner than other women.

Women are socialized to accept the idea that their body size is an integral component of their self-worth (Grover, Keel, & Mitchell, 2003; Rodin, 1992) and they tend to underestimate what female body size is perceived as most attractive (Markey, Markey, & Birch, 2004; Rozin & Fallon, 1988). Women's attitudes and behaviors concerning their bodies and weight appear to result, at least in part, from the stringent physical standards of attractiveness that confront women (Brownell, 1991; Grogan & Richards, 2002). Women are increasingly unlikely to attain the thin ideal presented to them in the media, are much more likely than men to receive negative criticism of their bodies, and are more likely than men to experience discrimination when they are overweight (Brownell, 1991; Murray, Touyz, & Beumont, 1995; Wadden & Stunkard, 1985). It is not surprising, then, that women tend to be more dissatisfied with their bodies and are more likely to participate in dieting behaviors than are men (Cash & Henry, 1995; Markey, Markey, & Birch, 2001). However, some researchers have pointed out that cultural ideals for the male body have changed in the last decade, which has prompted greater concerns now than ever before about body and weight issues among boys and men (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003, 2004a; Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999).

### **Body Image and Dieting Behaviors Among Men**

Early research on body image and weight concerns was focused primarily on girls and women; little research addressed these issues among boys and men. Recently, Smolak (2003) suggested that during adolescence, boys become concerned with both their body size and muscularity, which causes them to experience levels of body dissatisfaction that are comparable to adolescent girls' body dissatisfaction. Consistent with this notion, some estimates indicate that 30–75% of preadolescent and adolescent boys are dissatisfied with their bodies (Collins, 1991; Erickson, Markey, & Tinsley, 2003; Gustafson-Larson & Terry, 1992; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004a). Because developmental research on the trajectory of boys' body image through adulthood is limited, it remains somewhat unclear if boys' body image concerns intensify with age. McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004a) have suggested that boys may develop greater body image concerns with age due to a greater awareness of male body ideals. However, it is difficult to discern the percent of men who are dissatisfied with their bodies

because reports of dissatisfaction vary considerably across studies, ranging from 30% to 95% (Cash, 1990; Davison et al., 2000; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001, 2004a; Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1986; Silberstein, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1988).

The behavioral correlates of men's body dissatisfaction are less clear than are the behavioral correlates of women's body dissatisfaction. Qualitative research indicates that men believe that the ideal male body is both lean and somewhat muscular. Researchers (e.g., Harvey & Robinson, 2003; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004a) have suggested that this body ideal is increasingly affected by media images that portray men's bodies as slender and sculpted. Thus, it appears that some men who are dissatisfied with their bodies are not necessarily only interested in losing weight, but are also concerned with becoming physically fit and muscular (Davis & Cowles, 1991; Grogan & Richards, 2002; Silberstein et al., 1988). Given that men's body dissatisfaction may not be due to a desire to lose weight (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004b), it seems probable that the dieting behaviors associated with women's body dissatisfaction are less likely to be found among men.

It is also possible that men who are dissatisfied with their bodies are less likely to experience psychological suffering than are women who are dissatisfied with their bodies. Although relations between body size and feelings of self-confidence among men have been found (Grogan & Richards, 2002; Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000), it appears that self-esteem and self-worth are associated with body image more for women than for men (Furnham & Greaves, 1994; Oberg & Tornstam, 1999; Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). Girls learn early in life that their bodies are objects that others will look at and admire (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Smolak, 2003). In contrast, boys are socialized to understand their bodies as agentic and admired by others based on how they function (Smolak, 2003). It follows then that men may focus more on physical fitness and exercise (i.e., behaviors regarded as healthy, except in extreme cases such as steroid use) if they are dissatisfied with their appearance, and they may be less likely than women to diet (Fox, Page, Armstrong, & Kirby, 1994; Grogan & Richards, 2002; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001; Ohzeki, Otahara, Hanaki, Motozumi, & Shiraki, 1993). Boys and men have been found to describe "getting fat" as something important to avoid, yet they believe that avoiding it is within their control (Grogan & Richards, 2002). Fur-

ther, because dieting is often viewed as an integral component of the feminine gender role (Gilbert & Thompson, 1996), men may be likely to avoid dieting. Thus, although reports indicate that men are increasingly concerned about their bodies and their weight, the degree to which dieting is undertaken in response to this concern remains unclear. In this study, we examined whether men who participate in dieting behaviors do so because they perceive themselves as heavier than other men perceive themselves or because they desire to look thinner than other men.

### Aims of the Present Study

The present study extends past research by examining relations between body dissatisfaction and dieting behaviors among women and men, as opposed to past research that was focused primarily on women. First, the prevalence of body dissatisfaction and healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors among a sample of young adult men and women was examined. Second, relations between men's and women's weight status, their body image, and their participation in healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors were explored. Finally, the relations between men's and women's perceptions of their own and their desired bodies and their reports of their dieting behaviors were examined using regression analyses so that a better understanding of the motives (e.g., a belief that they are heavy, a desire to be thin) that lead to dieting behaviors could be discerned.

Consistent with past research, it was hypothesized that women would be more dissatisfied with their bodies and more likely to participate in both healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors than would men and that body satisfaction would be inversely related to dieting behaviors. However, it was expected that a majority of men in this sample would report some dissatisfaction with their bodies. It was anticipated that a majority of both men and women in this sample would participate in some healthy dieting behaviors, but relatively few men would participate in unhealthy dieting behaviors. It was expected that among both men and women body size would be inversely related to body satisfaction and positively related to dieting behaviors. Finally, exploratory analyses were conducted to examine whether men and women who frequently participate in dieting behaviors believe that they are heavier than infrequent dieters do or whether they desire to be thinner than infrequent dieters do.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

Two hundred and eight adults (104 women, mean age = 23.87 years; 104 men, mean age = 25.88 years) participated in the present study as part of a larger study of links between romantic relationships and health. This sample was predominantly European American; 76% of men reported that they were of European American/White background (10% were African American, 7% were Asian, and 7% were Hispanic), and 71% of women reported that they were of European American/White background (9% were African American, 7% were Asian, 8% were Hispanic, and 5% were of an "other" ethnic background). This sample was socioeconomically diverse; 54% of men reported incomes under \$20,000 per year, 29% reported incomes between \$20,000 and \$49,000 per year, 14% reported incomes between \$50,000 and \$75,000, and 3% reported incomes over \$75,000 per year. Sixty-nine percent of the women reported incomes under \$20,000 per year, 24% reported incomes between \$20,000 and \$49,000 per year, 7% reported incomes between \$50,000 and \$75,000, and <1% reported incomes over \$75,000 per year. The majority of this sample (60%) reported being married or living with a significant other.

Participants were recruited from a northeastern university campus and the surrounding area using fliers and advertisements. Participation in this study lasted approximately 1.5 hr and included the completion of the measures described below among a variety of other measures that assessed health attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. Participants were compensated with \$25.00, except for 14% of the sample who elected to be compensated with 2 hr of Introductory Psychology research credit.

### Measures

#### *Weight Status*

Participants' weight status was operationalized using body mass index scores (BMI; weight [kg]/height<sup>2</sup> [m]). Based on the recommendations of Lohman, Roche, and Martorell (1988), three height and weight measurements were collected for each participant by trained research assistants. Participants' average weight and height were used to calculate their BMIs. In this sample, men's average BMI was 27.52 ( $SD = 5.96$ , range = 18.79–49.66)

and women's average BMI was 24.29 ( $SD = 5.58$ , range = 17.45–48.59). The percent of men in this sample who were overweight or obese (BMI > 25) is consistent with national statistics on the prevalence of overweight and obesity. However, the percent of women who were overweight or obese (BMI > 25) was slightly lower than the percent typically reported for women (CDC, 2005; Mokdad et al., 2003) (see Table I).

#### *Body Image*

The male and female versions of the Contour Drawing Rating Scale (Thompson & Gray, 1995) were used to assess participants' perceptions of their bodies and their body satisfaction. Participants were asked to indicate which picture (range from 1 = *very thin* to 9 = *very overweight*) they thought looked like them and which picture they would like to look like. These scores were used in analyses to indicate participants' own and desired bodies.

Body satisfaction was calculated using discrepancy scores: the "figure they would like to look like" minus the "figure that most looked like them." Satisfaction scores ranged from -8 to +8. Positive scores indicate that participants are dissatisfied and want to be heavier,<sup>4</sup> zero indicates satisfaction, and negative scores indicate that participants are dissatisfied and want to be thinner. In previous research, the test-retest reliability for this measure was .79 (Thompson & Gray, 1995).

#### *Dieting Behaviors*

Participation in healthy (e.g., eating fruit and vegetables) and unhealthy (e.g., purging) dieting behaviors was assessed using the Weight Control Behavior Scale (WCBS; French, Perry, Leon, & Fulkerson, 1995). The WCBS is a measure of various weight loss behaviors; it contains a healthy dieting behavior (12 items) and an unhealthy dieting behavior (9 items) subscale.<sup>5</sup> For each weight loss behavior, participants were asked to indicate how

<sup>4</sup>Only 2.8% of the women and 11.5% of the men had positive body satisfaction scores. When analyses were conducted excluding these participants the findings were comparable. Thus, all body satisfaction scores are included in the results.

<sup>5</sup>Two items from the Weight Control Behavior Scale that comprise the "Weight Loss Group factor" subscale and one item "Other" were not included in the following analyses because they do not represent clearly "healthy" or "unhealthy" dieting behaviors (French et al., 1995).

**Table I.** Descriptive Information About Constructs

Construct	Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Range	Mean difference between men and women [ <i>SE</i> ]	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Healthy dieting <sup>a</sup>				
Men	.55 (.40)	.00–1.57	–.28***	.70
Women	.83 (.40)	.00–1.64	.05	
Unhealthy dieting <sup>a</sup>				
Men	.09 (.15)	.00–1.00	–.05*	.28
Women	.14 (.21)	.00–1.56	.02	
Body satisfaction <sup>a</sup>				
Men	–.62 (1.24)	–6.00–2.00	.80***	.59
Women	–1.42 (1.45)	–6.00–3.00	.19	
Body mass index <sup>a</sup>				
Men	27.52 (5.96)	18.79–49.66	3.23***	.56
Women	24.48 (5.58)	17.45–48.59	.80	
% Overweight <sup>b</sup>			$\chi^2$	$\Phi$
Men	65%		24.96***	.35
Women	31%			
% Obese <sup>b</sup>			$\chi^2$	$\Phi$
Men	27%		10.432**	.22
Women	10%			

*Note.* The percent of overweight (BMI > 25) or obese (BMI > 30) is defined by criteria established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2004). The percent of overweight participants includes those participants who are obese (i.e., a participant who is obese, by definition, is also overweight).

<sup>a</sup>*df* = 206.

<sup>b</sup>*df* = 1.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

often they had used each strategy in the past year to try to lose weight. Each dieting strategy was rated on a Likert scale that ranges from 0 to 2; “0” indicates they had never used the strategy, “1” indicates that they had sometimes used the strategy, and “2” indicates they always had used the strategy. For both the healthy dieting behavior scale and the unhealthy dieting behavior scale, participants’ responses were aggregated across items. The healthy dieting behavior scale assesses behaviors including “eat more fruit and vegetables” and “eliminate snacking.” Cronbach’s alphas for this scale were .87 for women and .88 for men. Items on the unhealthy dieting behavior scale include “diet pills” and “vomiting.” Cronbach’s alphas for the unhealthy dieting scale were .70 for women and .67 for men.

**RESULTS**

**Prevalence of Body Dissatisfaction and Dieting Behaviors**

It was hypothesized that the majority of men and women would experience some body dissatisfac-

tion and participate in some healthy dieting behaviors and that women would be more dissatisfied with their bodies and more likely than men to diet. Consistent with this hypothesis, Table I indicates that, although men were almost twice as likely as women to be overweight or obese (65% vs. 31%),  $\chi^2(1) = 24.96$ , *p* < .001, men were more satisfied with their bodies (*M* = –.62, *SD* = 1.24) than women were (*M* = –1.42, *SD* = 1.45), *t*(206) = 4.13, *p* < .001. As expected, the majority of women (77%) and men (65%) reported at least some dissatisfaction (i.e., body satisfaction ≠ 0) with their bodies. Women were also more likely to have participated in both healthy (*M* = .83, *SD* = .40) and unhealthy (*M* = .14, *SD* = .21) dieting behaviors than men were (*M* = .55, *SD* = .40 and *M* = .09, *SD* = .15, respectively), *t*(206) = –5.09, *p* < .001 and *t*(206) = 2.12, *p* < .05, respectively. As hypothesized, a majority of both men (79%) and women (95%) in the current sample reported having participated in at least one healthy dieting behavior, whereas only a majority of women (57% vs. 36% of men) had utilized at least one unhealthy dieting behavior.

**Table II.** Correlations among Men's and Women's BMI, Body Satisfaction, and Dieting Behaviors

	BMI	Body satisfaction	Healthy dieting behaviors	Unhealthy dieting behaviors
BMI	—	-.57** <sup>a</sup>	.21* <sup>a</sup>	.09 <sup>a</sup>
Body satisfaction	-.64** <sup>a</sup>	—	-.34** <sup>a</sup> (-.28* <sup>b</sup> )	-.21* <sup>a</sup> (-.19* <sup>b</sup> )
Healthy dieting behaviors	.39** <sup>a</sup>	-.42** <sup>a</sup> (-.25* <sup>b</sup> )	—	.26** <sup>a</sup>
Unhealthy dieting behaviors	.29** <sup>a</sup>	-.39** (-.28* <sup>b</sup> )	.32** <sup>a</sup>	—

Note. Women's correlations are presented above the diagonal; men's correlations are presented below the diagonal. Values in parentheses are correlations controlling for BMI.

<sup>a</sup>*df* = 102.

<sup>b</sup>*df* = 101.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

### Correlations Among Body Size, Body Satisfaction, and Dieting

It was hypothesized that, among both men and women, body size would be negatively related to body satisfaction and positively related to dieting behaviors and that body satisfaction would be negatively related to dieting behaviors. Analyses of the relations among men's and women's BMI, body satisfaction, and dieting behaviors tended to confirm this pattern; in general, BMI was significantly related to body satisfaction and dieting behaviors (see Table II). In other words, participants who were relatively heavy were less satisfied with their bodies and more likely to diet than participants who were relatively slender. However, women's BMIs were not associated with their participation in unhealthy dieting behaviors. Table II also illustrates the consistent relations between body satisfaction and dieting behaviors. Specifically, men and women who wanted their bodies to look thinner were more likely to engage in both healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors than were participants who were relatively satisfied with their bodies.

Next, correlations were conducted to examine whether or not the relations between body satisfaction and dieting could be completely attributed to participants' actual body size. Table II presents the relations between body satisfaction and healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors, after we controlled for BMI. Even when BMI was statistically controlled, relations between men's and women's body satisfaction and healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors remained significant.

### Relations Between Healthy Dieting Behaviors and Body Satisfaction

The above analyses suggest that men and women who were unsatisfied with their bodies, irre-

spective of their actual BMIs, were more likely to engage in healthy dieting behaviors than were individuals who were satisfied with their bodies. As mentioned earlier, it is unclear what elements of men's and women's body dissatisfaction might motivate them to participate in such dieting behaviors. In the current study, we examined two possible motives that might contribute to dieting behaviors: (a) individuals who are frequent dieters perceive their bodies as heavier than infrequent dieters perceive themselves but do not necessarily want to look thinner than infrequent dieters do, or (b) individuals who are frequent dieters perceive their bodies in a similar manner as infrequent dieters perceive themselves but want to look thinner than infrequent dieters do.

To investigate whether one of these motives contributed to the negative correlation between healthy dieting and body satisfaction, two separate regression analyses (in which BMI was controlled) were computed for each gender. Each regression analysis predicted one of the body figures that participants selected (either the figure that "looks most like them" or the figure that represents "what they would like to look like") from their BMI and healthy dieting behaviors. Results from these analyses are presented in Table III. Of particular interest are the relations between healthy dieting behaviors and the figure selected by a participant. Men's healthy dieting was not related to the body they wanted to look like,  $sr = -.05$ ,  $p > .05$  but was significantly related to the body they thought they looked like,  $sr = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ . A similar pattern existed for women; healthy dieting was not related to the body they wanted to look like,  $sr = -.08$ ,  $p > .05$ , but was related to the body they thought they looked like,  $sr = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ . Figure 1 displays the equations for both men and women that predict the "body participants wanted to look like" and the "body participants thought they looked like" from participants' healthy dieting behaviors. As shown in this figure, it appears that the

**Table III.** Summary of Regression Analyses That Predict Men’s and Women’s Body Figure Selections

Gender	Body figure selected	Predictors	B	SE B	Semipartial correlation
Healthy dieting Men (N = 104)	Body participants wanted to look like	Intercept	4.35		
		BMI	.04	.01	.27**
		Healthy dieting	-.11	.22	-.05
	Body participants thought they looked like	Intercept	1.43		
		BMI	.16	.02	.61***
		Healthy dieting	.55	.26	.15*
Women (N = 104)	Body participants wanted to look like	Intercept	1.39		
		BMI	.11	.02	.46***
		Healthy dieting	-.29	.30	-.08
	Body participants thought they looked like	Intercept	-1.42		
		BMI	.25	.02	.70***
		Healthy dieting	.61	.30	.14*
Unhealthy dieting Men (N = 104)	Body participants wanted to look like	Intercept	4.34		
		BMI	.04	.01	.27**
		Unhealthy dieting	-.24	.64	-.04
	Body participants thought they looked like	Intercept	1.54		
		BMI	.16	.02	.64***
		Unhealthy dieting	1.91	.76	.17*
Women (N = 104)	Body participants wanted to look like	Intercept	1.33		
		BMI	.11	.02	.47***
		Unhealthy dieting	-1.24	.55	-.20*
	Body participants thought they looked like	Intercept	-1.12		
		BMI	.26	.02	.74***
		Unhealthy dieting	-.07	.63	-.01

Note: \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

reason a negative relation exists between men’s and women’s healthy dieting behaviors and body satisfaction is because frequent healthy dieters tended to think they looked heavier than infrequent dieters thought they did. However, frequent dieters did not necessarily want to look thinner than the infrequent dieters wanted to look.

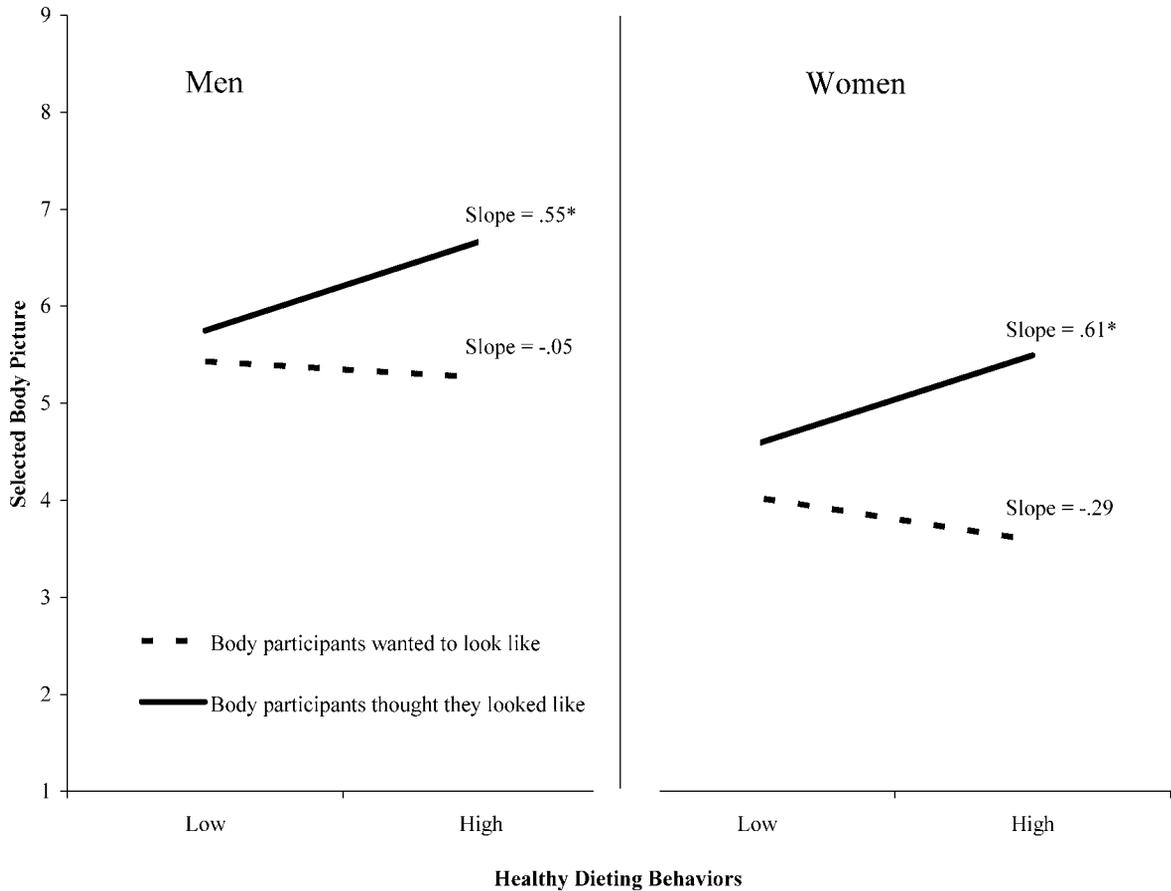
**Relations Between Unhealthy Dieting Behaviors and Body Satisfaction**

Additional regression analyses (in which BMI was controlled) were computed to investigate motives that contribute to the negative correlation between unhealthy dieting and body satisfaction. Each regression analysis predicted one of the body figures that participants selected (either the figure that “looks most like them” or the figure that represents “what they would like to look like”) from their BMI and unhealthy dieting behaviors. As seen in Table III, no significant relation was found between the figure men reported wanting to look like and their unhealthy dieting,  $sr = -.04, p > .05$ , but there was a significant relation between the figure they thought they looked like and unhealthy dieting,  $sr =$

$.17, p < .05$ . These findings were reversed for women: unhealthy dieting was related to the figure they wanted to look like,  $sr = -.20, p < .05$ , but was unrelated to the figure they thought they looked like,  $sr = -.01, p < .05$ . Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of each equation for men and women. It appears that for men and women the relations between unhealthy dieting and body satisfaction occurred for different reasons. As shown in Fig. 2, men who were frequent unhealthy dieters thought they were heavier than the infrequent dieters thought they were. However, they did not necessarily want to look thinner than infrequent dieters wanted to look. In contrast, women who were frequent unhealthy dieters did not think they were heavier than the infrequent dieters thought they were. However, they wanted to look thinner than the infrequent dieters wanted to look.

**DISCUSSION**

In the present study, we examined the prevalence of men’s and women’s body dissatisfaction and dieting behaviors and the relations between weight status, body dissatisfaction, and dieting behaviors. We also explored the relations between men’s and



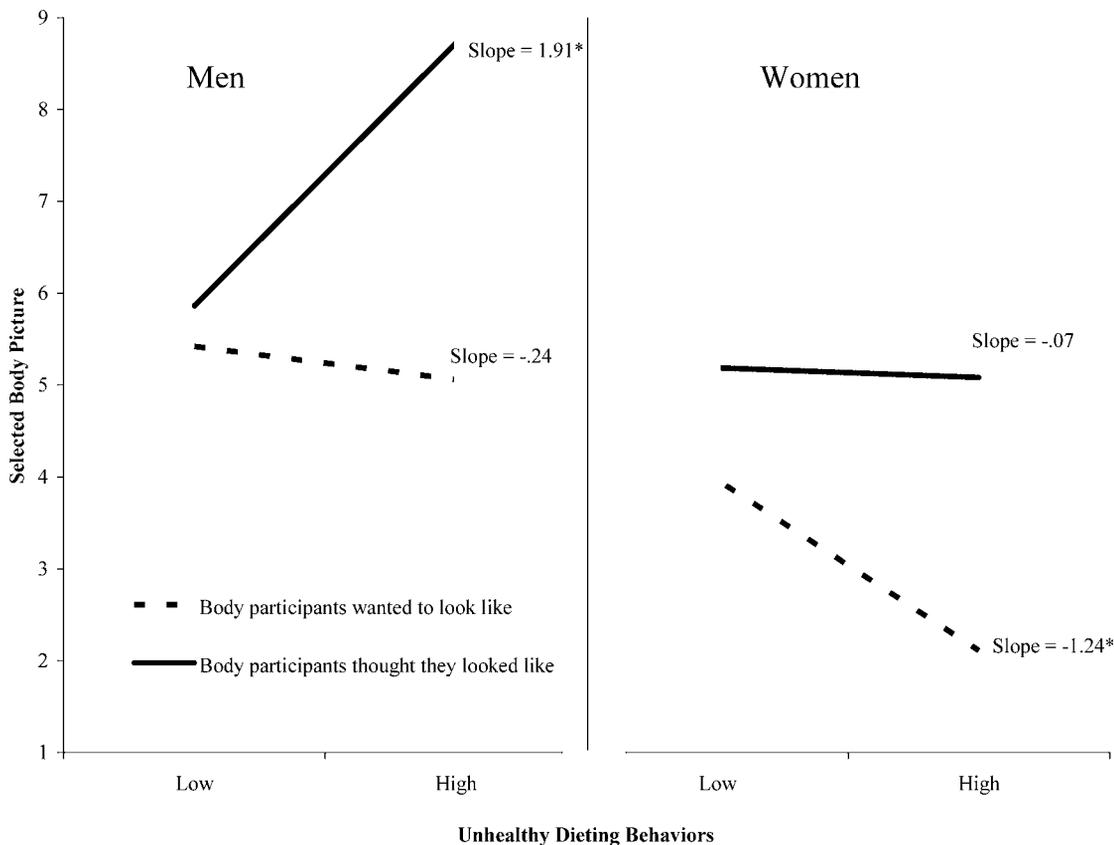
**Fig. 1.** Regression analyses of the relations between men's and women's body satisfaction and healthy dieting behaviors. *Note:* Graphic representations of the men's and women's equations to predict the "body participants wanted to look like" and the "body participants thought they looked like" from participants' BMI and healthy dieting behaviors. In the regression equations used to create this figure, *low healthy dieting* = 0, *high healthy dieting* = 1.5, *men's BMI* = 27.52, and *women's BMI* = 24.48 (the mean BMIs for each gender). It should be noted that, regardless of the values employed for dieting or BMI, the slopes of the regression lines in this figure would remain unchanged.

women's body image and their healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors. Even though the majority of men in this sample tended to be overweight or obese (BMI > 25), they were more likely to be satisfied with their bodies than were the women (who were less likely to be overweight or obese). However, the majority of men still reported at least some dissatisfaction with their bodies. Further, although more women than men reported dieting, 79% of men had participated in at least one healthy dieting behavior and over 36% of men reported having participated in at least one unhealthy dieting behavior during the past year. These results suggest that dieting behaviors are fairly common among both men and women.

For the most part, correlational analyses yielded the hypothesized findings: participants who were heavier were less likely to be satisfied with their bod-

ies and more likely to diet than those who were thinner. These relations were significant for both men and women, with one exception. Among women, body size (BMI) was not associated with participation in unhealthy dieting behaviors. This finding suggests that women's participation in dieting behaviors such as purging, fasting, or using diet pills is unrelated to their weight status. It is possible that women who participate in unhealthy dieting behaviors such as purging or fasting are maintaining unrealistic (even disordered eating) cognitions about their bodies and weight. These maladaptive cognitions may contribute to unhealthy dieting practices among women, independent of their actual body size.

Correlational analyses also examined relations between body satisfaction and dieting behaviors. As expected, both men and women who were



**Fig. 2.** Regression analyses of the relations between men’s and women’s body satisfaction and unhealthy dieting behaviors. *Note:* Graphic representations of the men’s and women’s equations to predict the “body participants wanted to look like” and the “body participants thought they looked like” from participants BMI and healthy dieting behaviors. In the regression equations used to create this figure, *low unhealthy dieting* = 0, *high unhealthy dieting* = 1.5, *men’s BMI* = 27.52, and *women’s BMI* = 24.48 (the mean BMIs for each gender). It should be noted that, regardless of the values employed for dieting or BMI, the slopes of the regression lines in this figure would remain unchanged.

dissatisfied with their bodies and wanted to look thinner were more likely to engage in both healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors than were individuals who were relatively satisfied with their bodies. These relations between men’s and women’s body satisfaction and dieting behaviors remained significant even after their BMIs were statistically controlled. Because BMI did not completely explain the link between body satisfaction and dieting, these results corroborate past findings (e.g., Markey et al., 2001) suggesting the importance of examining psychological motives that may contribute to dieting behaviors.

Several regression analyses were conducted to understand men’s and women’s motives for participating in healthy and unhealthy dieting behaviors. The results of these analyses suggest that men and women have similar motives for participating in healthy dieting behaviors. Participants who fre-

quently engaged in healthy dieting were likely to view themselves as heavier than did infrequent dieters, but they did not necessarily want to be thinner than infrequent dieters did.

Our analyses suggest that men and women have different motives for participating in unhealthy dieting behaviors. Men who participated frequently in unhealthy dieting behaviors thought they were heavier than infrequent dieters thought they were. In contrast, women who participated frequently in unhealthy dieting behaviors wanted to look thinner than infrequent dieters wanted to look. These findings suggest an important difference in men’s and women’s use of maladaptive weight-loss strategies. It appears that men adopt these strategies when they believe they are overweight. However, given that no relation was found between women’s BMIs and unhealthy dieting behaviors, it appears that women who

engage in unhealthy dieting behaviors are *not* doing so because they are overweight. Instead, these women may possess unrealistic standards of what they would like to look like, and hence they are willing to adopt unhealthy behaviors to achieve their ideals. It may be that some women adopt these strategies when they want to reach a thin ideal that eludes them when they rely on healthy dieting strategies.

### Limitations

Although the present study contributes to the literature as an investigation of relations between men's body image and dieting behaviors, some limitations of this study warrant mention. We examined body image and dieting behaviors among a relatively homogenous sample. Future research endeavors are needed to determine if these findings are generalizable to diverse ethnic groups. This study could also be extended by using additional measures of body image and dieting behaviors. Although the pictorial measure of body image (Thompson & Gray, 1995) employed in this study is widely used, it is somewhat limited because it only captures dissatisfaction related to body size and does not address concerns regarding body shape or muscularity. The measure of men's unhealthy dieting behaviors (French et al., 1995) proved to have modest reliability, which suggests that some additional or different questions about men's dieting behaviors should be included in future research. Finally, these results should be interpreted with caution, as cause cannot be determined based on the correlational nature of the design employed. It is not possible to discern whether, for example, men's body dissatisfaction is conclusively *causing* their participation in dieting behaviors.

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Traditionally, dieting has been conceptualized as a feminine behavior (Grogan & Richards, 2002). However, findings from our study indicate that, although body image and dieting behaviors may be less problematic among men than among women, a noteworthy portion of men are dissatisfied with their bodies and attempt to change them through dieting. These results corroborate recent research by McCabe and Ricciardelli (2004a) suggesting the importance of examining body image and weight-control behaviors among boys and men. Further, although men in the present study who were interested in losing weight were likely to utilize healthy weight-management approaches, it appears that men may

be at risk of adopting unhealthy weight-management strategies, particularly when they believe that they are heavy. Additional research should extend this and past studies (e.g., Grogan & Richards, 2002; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004a) by continuing to examine boys' and men's motives and strategies to both lose weight and reshape their bodies.

The present findings are important given the recent attention provided by the media, the government, and public health professionals to improve Americans' diet and to battle the "obesity epidemic" in many industrialized nations (Wald & Willett, 2004). Dieting often *appears* to be an easy solution when weight management is necessary. However, the present findings are a reminder of the tendency of many adults, regardless of gender, to utilize unhealthy dieting behaviors in attempts to lose weight. These strategies are likely to compromise individuals' health if they are maintained over time. The findings of the present study may benefit efforts to decrease unhealthy dieting behaviors by explicating the different motives that men and women report for participating in these behaviors.

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