Puberty and Body Dissatisfaction in Girls

WASHINGTON — Pubertal changes were more likely to trigger body dissatisfaction in white girls than in African American girls in a study of 331 girls, reported Tiffany Floyd, Ph.D., in a poster presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

Previous studies have shown that body dissatisfaction during puberty is more common among girls than among boys—because pubertal changes conflict with the idealized image of the thin female—and that this increase in body dissatisfaction may promote depression. However, additional research has shown that larger female body types are more desirable and acceptable among African Americans than they are among whites, wrote Dr. Floyd, of City College, New York, and her colleagues.

The study included girls in grades 4 through 9, with an average age of 12 years. Approximately 50% of the girls were African American. Overall, white girls reported significantly more body dissatisfaction than did African American girls. Although pubertal status did not directly predict depression in either group, pubertal status significantly predicted body dissatisfaction among white girls in a linear regression analysis, which in turn predicted depressive symptoms.

Pubertal status failed to predict body dissatisfaction among African American girls, but body dissatisfaction significantly predicted depressive symptoms independent of pubertal status.

—Heidi Splete