



Assessing the Risk of Pathological Weight Management Behaviors: A Study of College Students

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Background

- The percentages of adolescents and adults who are overweight or obese have recently reached historical highs in the United States.¹
- While majority of Americans have been expanding their waistlines, many others have developed a dangerous preoccupation with the desire to be thin.

2



Background

- The desire to be thin is more pervasive among females, although males are also susceptible to body image concerns and the development of pathological weight management behaviors.
- Body image concerns and subsequent behaviors have not been researched as extensively in men as they have been in women.⁶

3



Background

- Regardless of gender, the desire to be thin can lead to pathological weight management behaviors, such as meal skipping, laxative use, self-induced vomiting, use of diet pills, restricted eating, compulsive exercise, and use of diuretics.
- These behaviors are indicators of eating disorders as listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, 4th edition.

4



Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between gender, BMI, the preoccupation with the desire to be thin, and pathological weight management behaviors.

5



Methods

- Nine-hundred fifty-six college students were surveyed in a four-year public research university in Upstate New York to assess eating, exercise, and weight management behaviors.
- The instrument, The Healthy Eating Patterns Assessment Survey, was borrowed and modified from a survey developed by Todd F. Heatherton.

6

Survey Instrument

- The survey had over 100 questions that included self-reported items about demographics, general eating patterns, dieting, exercise, substance use, and social relationships and perception of self.
- Self reported body weight and height were used to determine BMI.

7

Symptoms of Pathological Weight Management Behaviors

- Specific questions addressed symptoms of PWMB including:
 - Fasting
 - Bingeing
 - Vomiting
 - Compulsive exercise
 - Use of diet pills, laxatives and diuretics.

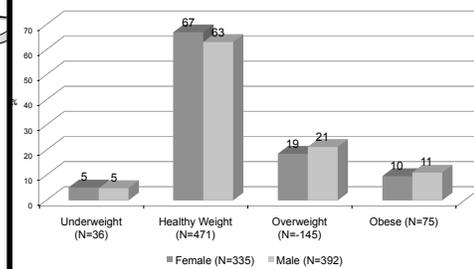
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Data Collection

- The survey was administered through courses in Health and Wellness Studies.
- All undergraduate students at the university must take courses from the Health and Wellness Studies program to meet the university's general education requirement, thus providing a cross-sectional representation of students from different academic majors and grade levels.

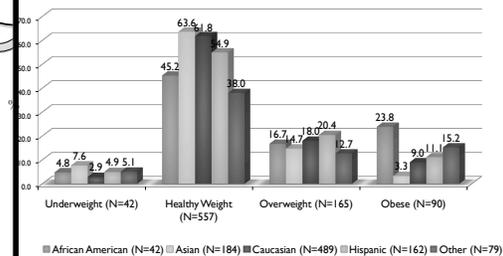
9

BMI by Gender



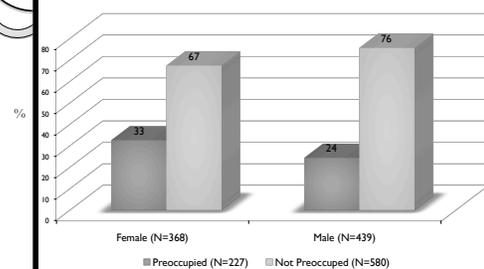
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BMI and Ethnicity

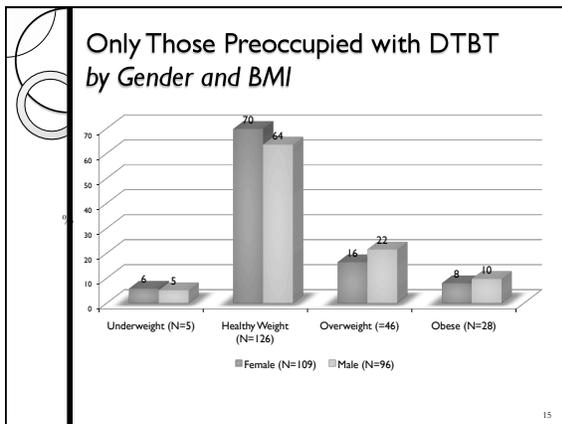
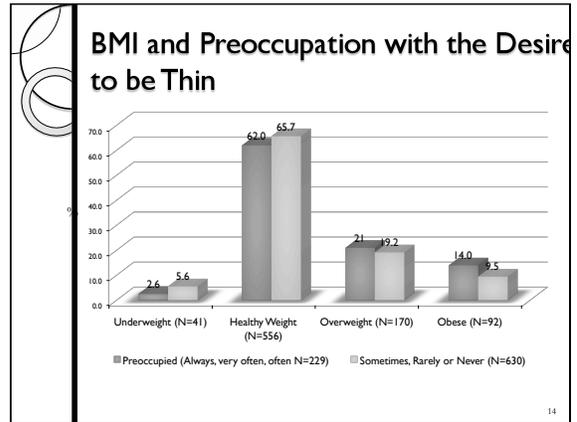
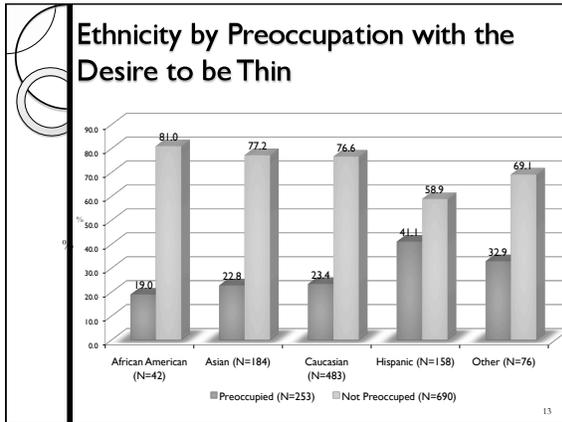


11

Gender by Preoccupation with the Desire to be Thin

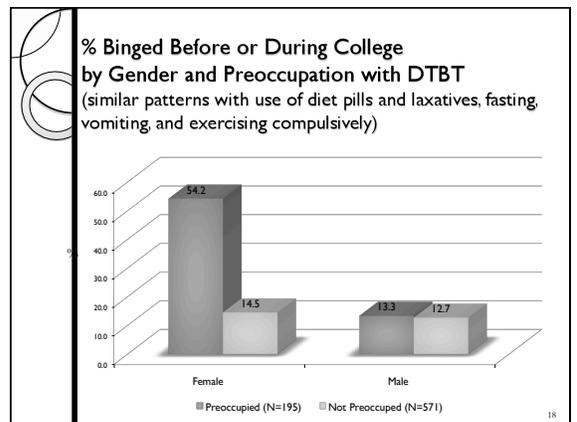
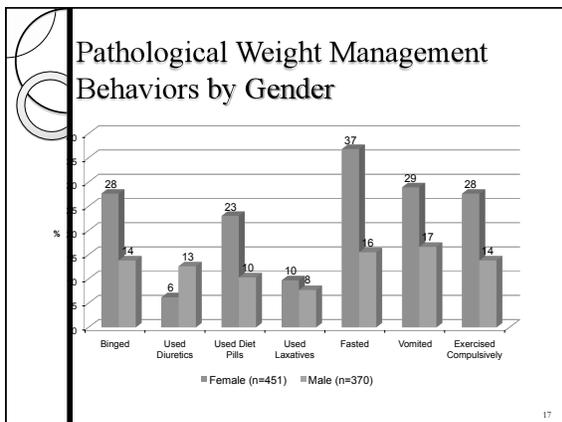


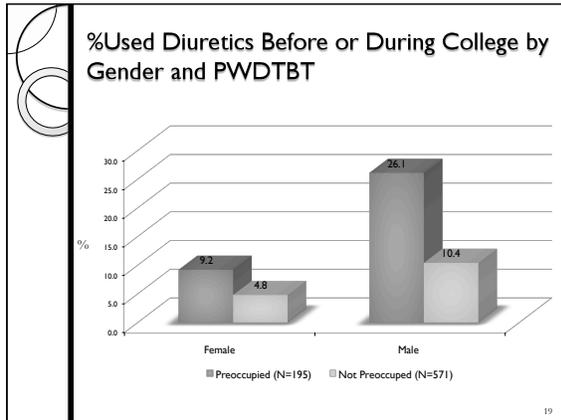
12



Odds Ratios: BMI and Pathological Weight Management Behaviors

BMI		Sig.	Odds Ratio
Overweight and Obese vs Underweight and Healthy Weight	Binged	.326	1.202
	Used Diuretics	.163	1.519
	Used Diet Pills	.000	1.976
	Used Laxatives	.429	1.242
	Fasted	.196	1.251
	Vomited	.837	.952
	Exercised Compulsively	.286	.815





Odds Ratios: Preoccupation WDTBT & Pathological Weight Management Behaviors

	Sig.	Odds Ratio
Desire to be thin (Yes)		
Binged	.000	3.959
Used Diuretics	.009	2.021
Used Diet Pills	.000	2.701
Used Laxatives	.027	1.707
Fasted	.000	3.430
Vomited	.000	3.046
Exercised Compulsively	.000	2.623

Females Only: Odds Ratios: PWDTBT & PWMB

	Sig.	Odds Ratio
Desire to be thin (Yes)		
Binged	.000	6.960
Used Diuretics	.114	1.985
Used Diet Pills	.000	3.558
Used Laxatives	.008	2.556
Fasted	.000	5.222
Vomited	.000	4.844
Exercised Compulsively	.000	3.898

Conclusion

- Our findings suggest that BMI is not a good predictor for engagement in pathological behaviors to control weight.
- Our analyses confirmed our hypothesis that college students who are preoccupied with the desire to be thin have a higher incidence of pathological weight management behaviors.

Conclusion

- Our study highlights the following suggestions in assessment and intervention efforts for eating disorders:
 - The question, "Are you preoccupied with the desire to be thin?" is an excellent query for women in screenings to help predict pathological weight management behaviors, but not as useful for men.

Conclusion

- Our findings strongly suggest that men and women engage in different sets of pathological weight management behaviors, and therefore alternative expressions and words are necessary when screening men for engagement in these behaviors.
- When screening men, questions such as "Are you preoccupied with the desire to lose body fat?" or "Are you preoccupied with the desire to gain more muscle mass?" may work more accurately.
- Incorporation of these suggestions in assessment tools may yield more reliable results.