CONSIDERING THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON BODY IMAGE: A LETTER TO THE EDITOR REGARDING SALMON ET AL.

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Salmon et al. (2014) tested the effect of a social proof heuristic on the food choices made by subjects with low versus high self-control and concluded that "conditions of low self-control may be even more beneficial for healthy eating behavior than high self-control in the presence of a heuristic" (Salmon et al., 2014). However, the study does not present any demographic data on the participants and did not control for possible confounding factors that may have had an impact on the participants' choices, outside of the heuristics.

An individual's cultural and social background influences their beliefs and perceptions about body image, and making healthy food choices does not always contribute to the body image that someone is trying to achieve or maintain. When asked about body image preferences, Latino-American and African-American men and women were more attracted to overweight individuals than to normal weight individuals and provided many reasons why being larger than normal was something that many of them were okay with and even strived for. These reasons included being able to fill out their clothes better, a physical attraction to larger individuals within their culture, a family history in which having a lot of food shows financial security, and having size to succeed in sports (Barroso, Peters, Johnson, Kelder, & Jefferson, 2010). Latina women in a focus group study explained that having curves and a thicker figure is more attractive to themselves and to Latino men, in contrast to Caucasian women whom they describe as striving more for the "thin norm" (Viladrich, Yeh, Bruning, & Weiss, 2009). The prevalence of obesity in the United States supports these statements, as there are a greater percentage of obese non-Hispanic black and Hispanic adults than there are obese non-Hispanic white adults (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden, & Curtin, 2010). The current study did not stratify participants by cultures, which could have played a role in the food choices that participants made. Considering the

influences that cultures have on body image, the image that some participants may be striving for would directly compete with the study goal of fostering healthy choices. The authors of this study should be commended for testing a technique that has been researched very little and for attempting to improve individuals' health choices by taking advantage of their lack of self-control. Now more research must be done that considers the influence of culture and body image goals that people have.

References

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