HerStory: Narrative Journeys of Young Black Women with Eating Disorders

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Abstract

Little is known of eating disorder (ED) pathology in Black females. It has long been perceived that Black females do not struggle with EDs; yet growing research suggests the opposite in this sub-population. This study explored ED development in three young Black women and uncovered adolescent experiential factors that were significant in their ED journeys. In the form of narrative inquiry, triangulation of interviews, observations, and abstracts were used to restory their ED accounts and glean a deeper understanding of their personal journeys. Findings revealed that preadolescence was a pivotal period when body image became a prominent focus rooted in social criticism that grew more powerful than their self-images could bear, adversely affecting their self-concept as Black girls. Trauma, sociocultural and sociopolitical variables, and comorbid psychological illnesses were instrumental in their ED developments and placed unhealthy emphasis on their bodies and mental states. Conclusions include 1) childhood experiences presented salient triggers for the development of EDs; 2) cultural distinctions influenced ED practices; 3) EDs were systems of control; and 4) salient factors prevented early intervention of EDs. Black women are coming forward to share experiences of conflict and hope to help further understand ED pathology in the Black community.

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