

Weight Bias Internalization during Pregnancy: An Exploration among Black Women

Kayla E. Sall, Ph.D., Emily Panza, Ph.D., Rob Carels, Ph.D. ABPP

East Carolina University, Brown University Alpert Medical School, The Miriam Hospital Weight Control & Diabetes Research Center

OBJECTIVE

This study assessed the prevalence and correlates of weight bias internalization in a sample of Black pregnant women.

METHODS

Participant Characteristics (n=122)

Sexual identity	Age yrs; M±SD	Race	BMI kg/m ² ; M±SD	Trimester
7% Asexual, 13% Bisexual, 3% Lesbian, 75% Straight, 2% Other	28.5 (±6.4)	100% Black/African American	30.3 (± 7.1) (kg/m ² ; mean ± SD)	34% First, 44% Second, 22% Third
High-Risk Pregnancy	Prior Miscarriage	Diagnosed Mental Health Condition	Geographic Location	Education
70% No, 18% Maybe/Unsure, 15% Yes	73% No, 2% Maybe/Unsure, 24% Yes	19% Yes, 81% No	20% Rural, 40% Suburban, 33% Urban, 7% Urban Inner City	35% ≤ High School/GED, 32% Associate, 19% Bachelor's, 12% Graduate degree

Quantitative Measures

Demographics

- Age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, income, geographic area

Obstetric-related Characteristics

- Questions about index pregnancy, gestational age

Weight-related Characteristics

- Current and pre-pregnancy Body Mass Index (BMI)
- Weight Bias Internalization Scale (WBIS; Durso & Latner, 2008)

- Body Image in Pregnancy Scale (BIPS; Watson et al., 2017)

Mood-related Measures

- Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS; Cox et al., 1987)

RESULTS

Weight Bias and Trimester

Clinically significant internalized weight bias **did not significantly vary by trimester** (1 = 33%, 2 = 34%, 3 = 30%)

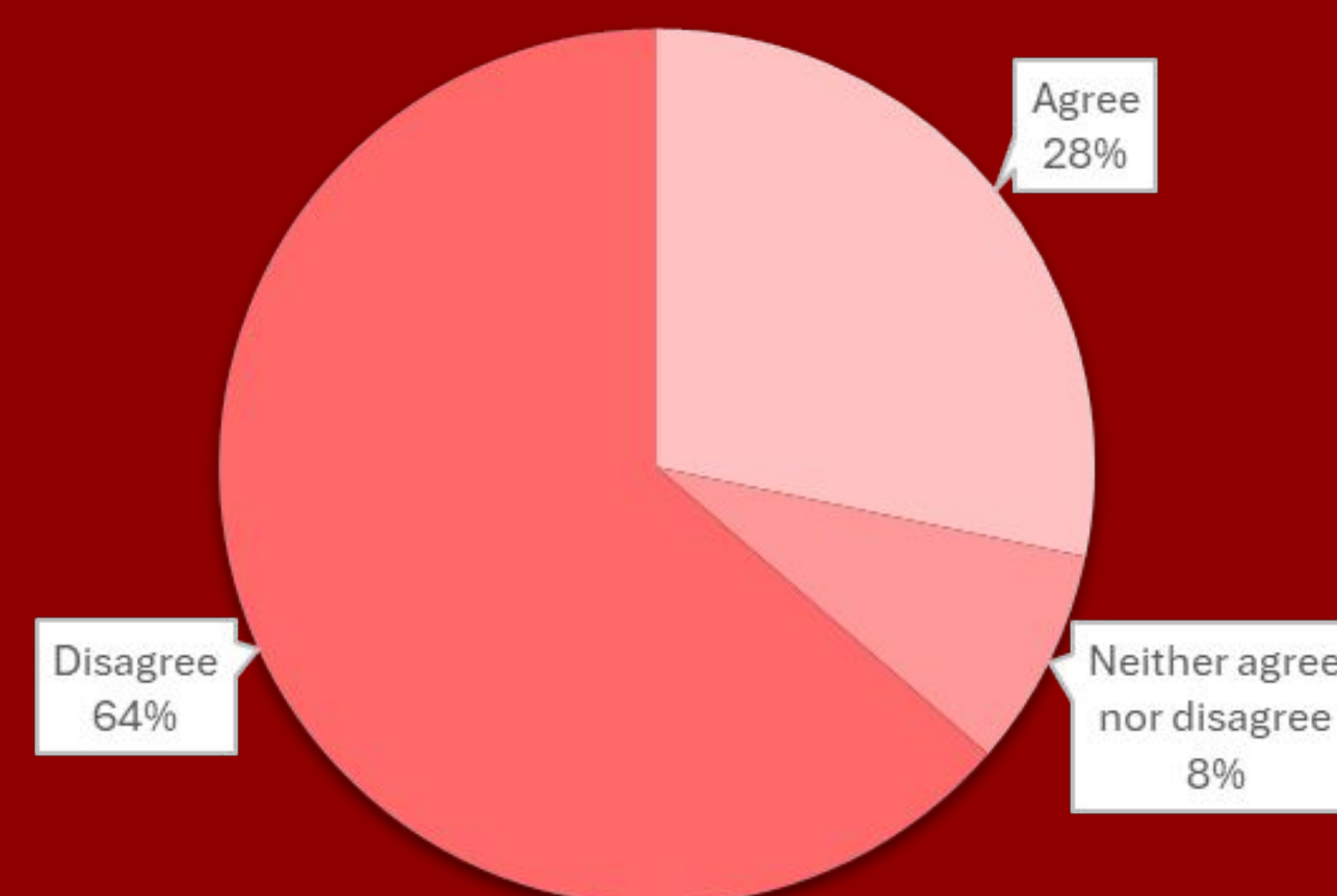
32.8% of Black pregnant women met criteria for clinically significant weight bias



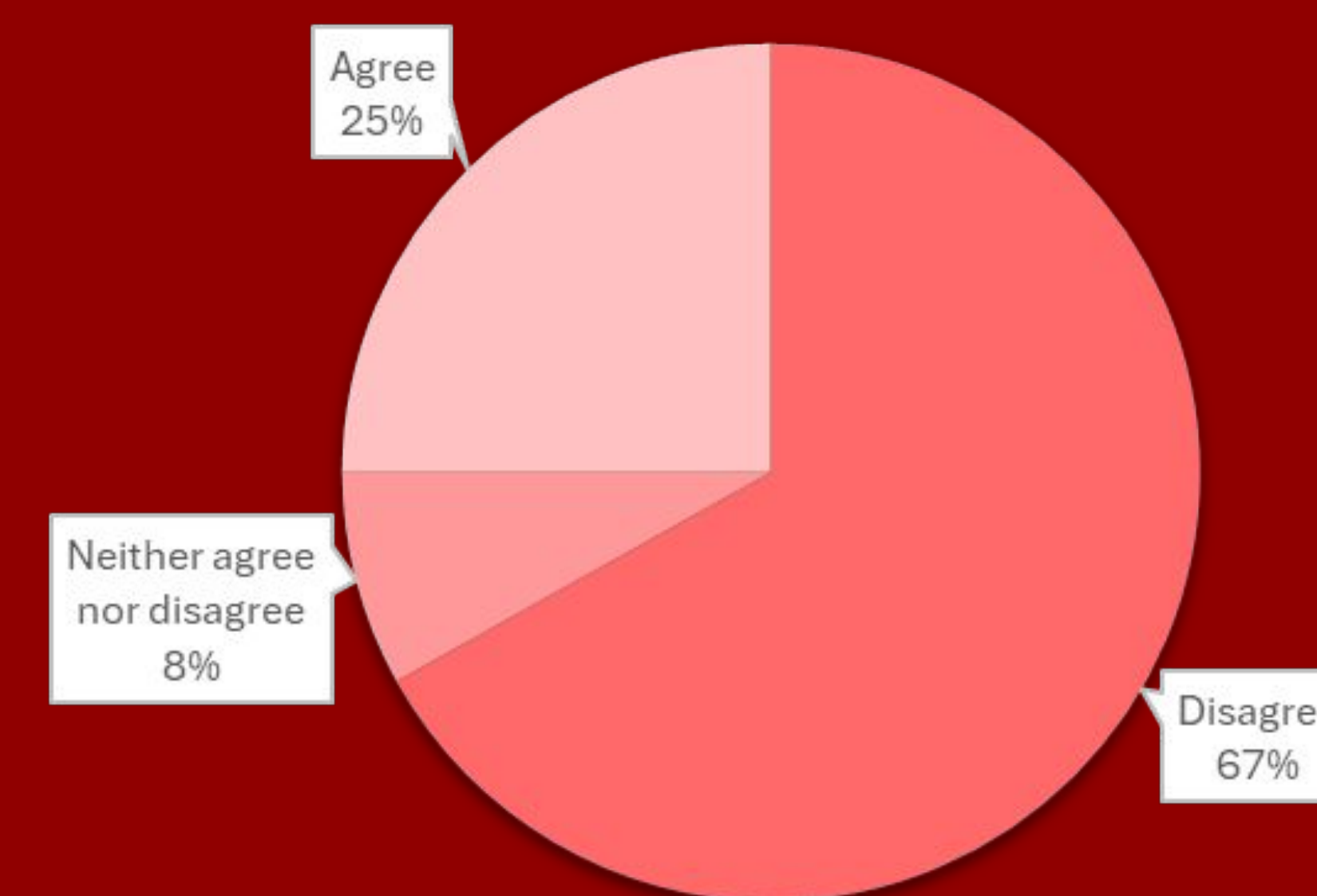
Higher weight bias internalization scores were associated with greater perinatal depression symptoms

Notable Item-Level Weight Bias Internalization Scores

"I am less attractive than most other people because of my weight"



"I hate myself for my weight"



Most Black pregnant women disagreed with this statement, **with 39.5% strongly disagreeing, 17.7% disagreeing, and 6.5% somewhat disagreeing**

Similarly, few Black pregnant women endorsed this statement, **with only 5.6% strongly agreeing, 8.1% agreeing, and 11.3% somewhat agreeing**

RESULTS (continued)

Weight Bias and BMI

Nor did clinically significant internalized weight bias **significantly vary by BMI** (23% healthy weight, 30% overweight, 20% Class I obesity, 12.5% Class II obesity, 15% Class III obesity)

Body Image among Black Pregnant Women

Weight Bias and Body Image

Greater weight bias internalization was **associated with greater body dissatisfaction** during pregnancy ($R^2 = .483, F(1,103) = 96.10, p < .001$)

Facets of Body Image

Black pregnant women were **most concerned with their appearance** ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.03$) and **least concerned with their complexion** during pregnancy ($M = 2.23, SD = 1.06$)

DISCUSSION

- Obesity and weight stigma research tends to undersample Black women, yet overstate the risk for overweight and obesity among this population
- Historically, studies have also found that Black women tend to have less weight bias and body image concerns than White women, and that this is a protective factor
- However, this study shows that clinically significant weight bias and body image issues are at play among this demographic, begging the question of how are weight bias and body image constructs unique among Black pregnant women, and whether researchers are accurately assessing their health needs

Future Directions

- This is one of the first studies to investigate weight bias internalization in Black pregnant women
- There is clear need for future research to explore the prevalence, phenomenology, and health impact of weight bias internalization in this community

QUESTIONS?

Contact Dr. Sall at Kayla_Sall@Brown.edu

Acknowledgements

The first author would like to thank her mentors, Drs. Panza and Carels, for their expertise and guidance throughout this research study, as well as the continuous love and support from her mother, grandmother, and dog Marley.



BROWN The Miriam Hospital
Alpert Medical School A Lifespan Partner