Age, Income, Ethnicity, and Breast Cancer: A Look at College Women’s Perceptions Regarding Self-Breast Examinations and Mammograms

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ABSTRACT
Despite the increased number of women diagnosed with breast cancer annually, many women do not perform self-breast examinations and mammograms. Consequently, the current study sought to examine college women’s perceptions regarding self-breast examinations and mammograms. One hundred forty-five college women participated in the current study, and completed a demographic questionnaire and Champion Health Belief Model (1984). Findings suggested that African American women were more likely to perform self-breast examinations compared to other ethnic groups. Furthermore, non-traditional aged students were more likely to receive a mammogram compared to traditional aged students. Lastly, women with close family relatives diagnosed with breast cancer did not feel susceptible to developing breast cancer while women with lower incomes were less likely to perceive health motivation as reason for performing a self-breast examination.

INTRODUCTION
According to the American Cancer Society (2005), approximately 40,410 women will die from breast cancer in the year 2005. In addition, ninety-five percent of new breast cancer cases occurred as well as 97% of breast cancer deaths in women forty years of age or older between 1998 to 2002. Although the American Cancer Society publishes breast cancer statistics, these statistics largely pertain to European and African American women. According to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, every ethnic group is at risk for developing breast cancer, yet certain groups tend to develop breast cancer more often than others. According to the Komen Foundation, possible differences in specific risk factors are due to: differences in the biology of the breast, differences in breast cancer screening rates, lack of awareness concerning mammogram screening, cost of insurance, and lack of access to screening facilities. The use of a relatively young sample and the scarcity of older women also limited our study. Lastly, clinical breast exams should be obtained every three years for women beginning at age 40 regardless of age, ethnicity, and income.

METHOD
Participants
Sample Size 145 female college students
Age (M = 28.09, SD = 9.63)
Participants’ Ethnicity
• African American ~ 26.9%
• Asian American/PI ~ 8.4%
• Biracial ~ 3.4%
• European American ~ 30.3%
• Hispanic/Latina ~ 29.7%
• Other ~ 4.8%

Health Practices
• 22% received a mammogram
• 70% practiced a self-breast examination within the last year
• 78% knew how to perform a self-breast examination

RESULTS
Hypothesis One
The first hypothesis proposed that European American were more likely to report higher rates of mammograms compared to Latina/Hispanic and African American women. A Pearson Chi-Square did not support this hypothesis (X2(1, N = 145) = 0.26, p > .05). European American (31.8%), Latina/Hispanic (20.9 %), and African American (20.5 %) women reported relatively the same amount of mammograms. See Figure 1 below.

Hypothesis Two
The second hypothesis proposed that European American women were more likely to perform self-breast examinations compared to other women. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed interesting findings (F (2, 139) = 2.33, p < .05). For example, European American women did not perform more self-breast exams (M = 2.70, SD = 1.70). Rather, African American women performed more self-breast exams, followed by Biracial (M =2.80, SD = 1.30), Latina/Hispanic (M = 2.49, SD =1.44), Asian American/PI, and Other (M = 1.71, SD = 1.68) women. See Figure 2.

DISCUSSION
Future Research Recommendations
Future research should continue to examine college women’s perceptions towards mammograms, self-breast examinations, and breast cancer. Many young females are unaware of the serious implications of breast cancer and the preventive measures to reduce their likelihood of developing breast cancer. Perhaps additional studies focusing on younger females may assist in changing their perceptions and behaviors towards breast cancer. Future advertisements and campaigns are needed to encourage younger women to take active approaches towards early breast cancer detection. In addition, research should examine how women were taught to perform self-breast examinations. It is unclear as to who teaches women how to perform self-breast examinations. Research should continue to focus on diverse women, representing diverse ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic realities. Researchers should examine why African American women perform more self-breast examinations compared to other women. Perhaps it is because past research has indicated that African American women are more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer, which emphasizes the need for early detection among African American women.