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College women and body image perception: The influence of peers, television, and print media

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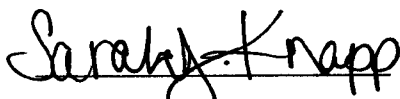
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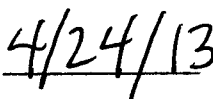
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College Women and Body Image Perception:

The Influence of Peers, Television, and Print Media

(TITLE)

BY

Sarah J. Knapp

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify how college women's image of self and their

bodies are impacted by their peers, as well as by television and print media. The

findings were based on qualitative research methodology by conducting in-depth

interviews with four college-aged women at a rural, Midwestern university.

The findings were not substantially different from other researchers findings on

women in previous literature. The women in this study faced similar problems that other

women had encountered before them: peer influence, body image dissatisfaction, their

own college development path, and how they perceive their body image in comparison to

other women. It was found in this study that the women had an awareness of how the

media could negatively affect their body image, but ultimately their peers influenced the

women more than any other factor questioned in the study.

Key words: *College women, body image, peer influence, eating attitudes, social*

comparison, media influence.

DEDICATION

Marilyn Monroe said it best, "To all the girls that think you're fat because you're not a size zero, you're the beautiful one, it's society who is ugly."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the True Gentleman of Sigma Alpha Epsilon: You all have been my favorite part about EIU for the past two years. Thank you for allowing me into your Fraternity and to advise you. You men are a huge reason why I have continued to love Greek Life beyond my years in undergrad. Your silliness was a breath of fresh air some days when all I felt like doing was screaming because of the crazy Grad School life. All of your encouraging words, popping into my office to see how I was doing, sending texts & emails...all of that made a difference and kept me sane and smiling. Continue to be TG's and make me proud. I hope you're tracking this, V.

To the women in Career Services: Your guidance was on par, and our conversations were so worthwhile. I loved being challenged in this office in so many different ways by all of you; and with that I thank you.

To my entire cohort: Each one of you has impacted me in some way over our time together. I appreciate our conversations, our learning moments and our funny moments that we all shared. To Jackie D'Andrea in particular: We did it. Zeta Omega Love. Thank you for supporting me and always offering to help me when I needed it the most. You truly are my cohort sister.

And to JAW: R.I.P. I hope you are fishing every day in heaven and loving every minute of it. You were truly one of a kind, and you are missed.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The role of mass media in promoting the thin ideal, affecting body esteem, and ultimately, promoting eating disorders in young women has been the focus of much research (Fuller-Tyszkiewicz & Mussap, 2011; Krcmar, Giles, & Helme, 2008; O'Dea, 2004; Swami & Smith, 2012). Studies have revealed that viewing images of thin individuals rather than average-size and plus-size individuals in several mediums (e.g., music videos, television programs, and magazines) result in a more negative body image and greater body dissatisfaction (Altabe & Thompson, 1993; Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Tiggeman & Slater, 2004; Want, Vicker, & Amos, 2009). Research states that the gap between women's actual body sizes and the media's use of unrealistically thin images has created public concern about "unhealthy" media messages which may cause girls and women to feel bad about their bodies and pressured to lose weight (Dittmar & Howard). Continual exposure to ultra-thin models creates an internalization of the thin-ideal body image, which then contributes to body dissatisfaction in women (Krones, Stice, Batres, & Orjada, 2005). One of the most established perspectives on the development of body dissatisfaction is sociocultural theory, which views the mass media and other sources of sociocultural pressure as powerful transmitters reinforcing the sociocultural body ideals (Dittmar, 2005).

Media are among the principle socializing agents in many societies around the world. Television, magazines, newspapers, radio, cinema, advertising, the Internet, and other "new media" or "new technologies" occupy—if not invade—much of our leisure time, and indeed our working time (Lopez-Guimera, Levine, Sanchez-Carracedo, &

Fauqet, 2010). Sociocultural factors, in particular the role of the media, have received

perhaps the most attention as possible contributors to body image disturbance and eating

dysfunctions (Fallon, 1990; Heinberg, 1996). Mass media can play an important role in

promoting consumerism, body objectification, and internalization of the current beauty

ideal (Lopez-Guimera et al.).

    Bordo (2003) discussed how women are personally impacted by the environments

around them, in particular the consumer system, as well as the society around them. If a

woman is anorexic, the societal norm is that she should be embarrassed to wear form

fitting clothes around her peers, given they would be able to tell her dramatic weight loss,

or such low weight. On the other hand, if a woman is obese, society often makes fun of

her body size. Obese people in society are also seen as lazy, and as having no self-

control, eating everything in sight (Bordo, 2003). College women can be particularly

vulnerable to the impact of the media and society on their body image.

    College women engage in social comparison in order to receive feedback about

their own appearance and their perceived attractiveness. Lindner, Hughes, & Fahy

(2008) found that college women's peers affect their identity formation and that over

time, college women could embrace unhealthy weight control practices as a response to

messages that they are receiving from their peers about their appearance. Latane's (1981)

Social Impact Theory stated that social impact rises based on the importance of the

source, the familiarity of the source to the perceived recipient, and the number of sources

that create a comparable impact. A college environment was found to be prone to social

impact because of the vast amount of time that college students spend with their peers, in

comparison to non-students and other adults in their lives (Blieszner & Adams, 1992;

Bourgeois & Bowen, 2001). The information provided shows that college women are influenced by their peers in many ways. It was found that the idea of social impact does play a key role in how a college woman goes about her college career, and whether she gives into the peer pressure ideology of social media (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Bourgeois & Bowen, 2001).

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) described how women make breaks from their past and former relationships and start new. This can explain how college women first entering a new place want to redefine themselves in a whole new world. When women come to college or a new place in life they are experiencing the "birth of self" which can be life changing (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 102). Women can be easily influenced by others because they themselves often do not know which path to take; in turn, women are influenced by their peers, as well as the media around them.

Statement of Purpose

The motivation behind this study stems from my own personal experiences with body image. As a college student I felt the pressure to look thin because of various things I was going through at the time. My first semester I lived in a residence hall, so of course I had a meal plan and could eat whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. I was constantly stuffing my face with grilled cheese, sub sandwiches, chips, cookies, pizza, pasta... you name it, and it was on my plate. I figured that I had a meal plan, so I might as well use that to my advantage by eating mass amounts of food when I was sad about not being at home with my family. I did not even think about the effect it was having on my body. And my friends loved me for who I was, so why change? My image of myself hit me even harder once I joined a sorority and lived amongst the women in the sorority house

my second semester as an undergrad. In moving in to the sorority house I lost my meal

plan. I became more conscious of who I was, and what I looked like.

From the moment my sorority sisters and I all moved in together, I knew things

were about to change. I was constantly around women who were at least half the size of

me, and I was constantly comparing my body size to theirs. I absolutely hated being the

"big girl" in my sorority for so many reasons. I did not know how to change because I

would still go out to eat even more now since I no longer had a meal plan. Food was

always around. Yet it seemed like the other girls were not gaining weight like I was. I

always wondered what if I became bulimic? What if I became anorexic? Would I lose

weight, and therefore look good?

I would starve myself by not eating breakfast almost every morning and seeing

how long I could go without eating, and then eat a little bit around dinnertime. The

constant pressure to lose weight for the next sorority formal or social event was always in

the back of my mind. I could hear girls in my sorority house puking their food up, and

see them also starving themselves. I felt as if they were all losing weight while I was not.

My body hated me and I hated my body. I loved nights where all of us girls would get

together, bake tons of sweet, fatty desserts, watch movies all night and just be girls. Yet

the next day I would feel so mad at myself for actually eating that much, and repeat the

cycle of trying to starve myself all day.

I look at women in the marketing advertisements for clothes. They are all an

average size 4-6 and it frustrates me that I used to want to look like that. And in reality, I

still want to lose more weight and be happy with my body. I should not be worried about

what I am eating in front of my friends. I should be able to eat what I want, gain weight

and still love myself. But I cannot. I have to eat healthy all of the time to be some size I can only dream about being. I cannot possibly obtain the weight I see on television shows, or advertisements, it is not realistic. And I would continue to look at my sorority sisters and feel like I would never fit the body size that most of them were. I struggled with it all through my college years as I was living in a sorority house. I would constantly feel the pressure of everyone around me, as well as the media. This pressure felt like a brick wall I could never knock down or get through. I would always feel like I would never lose weight because it just was not in my life plan. I was meant to be bigger boned and tall, never a skinny woman. This brick wall kept blocking me throughout my first few years of college. This study was important to me personally because it has helped me understand, and better grasp, my own struggle throughout my college years better. Also, this study was important because it helped me understand the struggles that college women go through in regards to their body image and the pressures that social media and peers put on them.

College is a challenging time where students are developing competency and autonomy and are beginning to figure out who they are (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). A woman in college begins to develop her own self through various means including exposure to new friends and ways of thinking, and to television and print media. As a college student myself, my body image was influenced by my peer group and the media. And my selection of media was often influenced by my sorority sisters because we spent so much time sitting in our sorority house watching *America's Next Top Model*, *One Tree Hill*, all of *MTV's* reality television shows; reading *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, or just gossiping about other college women or reality stars and how we wanted to look like

them. Constantly this talk was consuming in my life; I was always exposed to it, whether

I wanted to be or not, it was a constant presence in my life. The pressure to meet

society's standards, as well as the pressure to want to look good for social functions was

a huge chunk of my college life. Mass media influences college women by portraying

certain types of women as attractive, often times disproportionally representing a body

image that is unlike most body types in society. I am writing about myself in this thesis.

As someone who has personally struggled with body image pressures from the media,

and especially my peers, I wanted to further investigate this phenomenon. The research

shows that the thin ideal expressed through the media impacts women of all body types.

The research shows how women are pressured through images presented to them through

television and the media. This study explored how college women react to the peer

pressures surrounding them. I hope to provide insight for more focused programming on

women and body image pressures that could be developed by Student Affairs

professionals. More programming should be generated about women, their body images,

and the effects that those around them or the media may have on how they perceive

themselves. Whether it be in Greek Life, residence hall floors, or just from a campuses

women's center, any programs or assistance to women stemming from this study would

be beneficial for women who have struggles with their body image.

Research Questions

This study sought to identify how college women's image of self and their bodies

are impacted by their peers, as well as by television and print media, by examining the

following research questions:

RQ1: What do college women report as being the greatest influence on how they perceive their bodies?

RQ2: What influence does peer group have on media consumption and how does that then influence body image?

RQ3: How does the need to fit in influence how college women perceive themselves and the social interactions they have with others?

RQ4: What kinds of behaviors related to body image do college women knowingly engage in to be socially accepted by a peer group?

Significance of Study

The association between media outlets and peer groups, and body image disturbances, eating disorders, and low self-worth has obvious important implications and should be examined (Tyler, Lopez, & Flores, 2009). This research provides Student Affairs professionals with information to develop programs for women on positive body image on university campuses nationwide. It also provides useful information to women's centers, either on campus or in a community, and educates professionals in higher education on how to work with women and their body image in a positive way.

Limitations of the Study

This was a small qualitative study done at a Midwestern university with over 9,900 students, thus the findings are not truly representative of all college women. The Caucasian women in this study were chosen at random; no other ethnic populations of women were looked at for this study. The vast body differences between Caucasian women and other culturally diverse women would have enriched the study. In a study by Rucker and Cash (1992), African-American women "evaluated their overall appearance

more positively, reported fewer negative thoughts about their body, and displayed less concern about dieting, fatness and weight fluctuations" (p. 296). While African-American women would have been an interesting tie-in to this study, Caucasian women solely were the subjects of this study.

When considering social media there is a wide spectrum of areas that this could encompass. However, for the purposes of this study, television and print media have been identified as the only factors, beyond social group, under investigation. The reasoning for just television and print media stems from social media outlets spanning across several outlets in this day and age. Putting a barrier around the research seemed necessary.

Personally, I have experienced these battles with body image, which has been considered as both a detriment and key to understanding the student perspective. However, I worked with others through this research to stay true to the study and to myself. My connection with the issue gives me a lens through which I can empathize with the college women. I was aware of my personal biases and I did not allow these to cloud my reports or assessment of the findings.

Definition of Terms

Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa. Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa are two common eating disorders that will be discussed in this research, and will be defined to include extreme caloric restrictions, self-induced vomiting, excessive exercise, and misuse of laxatives, diuretics, and diet pills (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Body Image. Body image is defined by *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia Britannica*™ as a personal picture of one's own physical appearance established both by self-observation, as well as taking in others own reactions. Based on that definition for the purpose of this study, *body image* will be defined as how women view their own body type in relation to those they see on television and in magazines as well as to those people who they are around each day.

Cultivation Theory. A theory developed by George Gerbner (1998) that suggests television is responsible for shaping viewers' conceptions of social reality. The more time people spend watching and / or living in the television world, the more they will believe what they see on television (Gerbner, 1998). The overview analysis of Cultivation Theory in Gerbner's (1998) article states that society learns repeated lessons from television, "Beginning with infancy, (society) is likely to become the basis for a broader world view, making television a significant source of general values, ideologies, perspectives as well as specific assumptions, beliefs and images" (p. 180).

Media. Tyler et al. (2009) reported that the term *media* usually refers to forms of communication that reach a large number of individuals, and for the purpose of this study, *media* will refer to the entertainment sources. Specifically, these sources will include television programs, movies and music videos, as well as fashion and exercise-related magazines.

Social Comparison Theory. In 2006, Bessenoff defined the *Social Comparison Theory* as a comparison a person makes between themselves related to others. It includes the perception of how different body types are similar or different to determine an individual's level of ability and success. When women are comparing their bodies to

what they see in the media, as well as comparing self-perception and perception of

attractiveness, many (or most) are finding that they *fail* to meet the social and cultural

standards, as well as having increased body dissatisfaction within their own bodies

(Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010).

　　　　Sociocultural Theory. Sociocultural theory is a perspective on the development of

body dissatisfaction that views the mass media (as well as other sources of sociocultural

pressures) as powerful transmitters and reinforcements of the culture we live in as being

ideal for our bodies (Levine & Harrison, 2004).

　　　　Thin Ideal. Harrison (2001) defined the *thin ideal* in the television and print

media as the desire to attain an unrealistic thinness in and of itself when comparing

oneself with the most beautiful, desirable, and successful women in the media who are

thin. These thin ideals can come from the media, as well as from the idea in which one

can be influenced by the images they may see in the media.

Summary

　　　　College women are affected by the pressures of body image and the thin ideal that

they see in the media, and from their peers with social comparison. With increased

exposure to social groups in college, ensuring that women are watched out for when

arriving to a college campus is crucial for their development as students. This qualitative

research into what affects women more, the social media or their peers, will be a great

way to provide insight when helping college women transition to college.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This literature review will provide the following overview: (1) the development of college women, using theories and other forms of evidence to show how women grow and develop through college and beyond, (2) how peer groups influence behaviors, thinking, and perception of self, (3) the influence of television and print media on women and body image, in particular television and print advertisements, and (4) how body image perceptions are created and formed throughout women's lives, specifically how women's perceptions of themselves can develop and change throughout their college years. All of this research will combine to describe the influence that television and print media have, along with college women's peers around them, and the effect that all of that together has on college women's perceptions of their own body image.

Development Before College

There is a period of life between childhood and adulthood called "adolescence" with different important life stages (Alfieri, Ruble, & Higgins, p. 1129). These important stages are when beliefs can change from what a child once knew, to what they are exposed to and learn as they go.

Raffaelli and Duckett (1989) found that from fifth grade to ninth grade the time a person spent talking with their friends increased drastically. A study by Larson and Richards (1991) found that as children move into adolescence, they spend more time with their friends and less time with their families (parents and siblings). Larson (2001) found in another study years later that, "The largest amount of U.S. youths' free time is spent playing, talking, hanging out, and participating in other unstructured leisure activities,

often with friends" (p. 161). This talking amongst one another can tie into women

talking about what they eat, what they saw in the media, and a number of other things

that could lead to women over-thinking their body size at an early age.

Development of College Women

Developmental theories are used as a way to understand how individuals grow

and develop through different phases of life. There are many developmental theories

related to women, especially women in college, but the theory particularly fitting for this

study was Gilligan's (1982) theory of moral development. Gilligan's theory, along with

other research, provides a foundation for understanding and exploring how women in

college are developing, and the way a woman may influence how she perceives herself.

In Gilligan's 1982 book, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and*

Women's Development, she utilized the work of Freud and Kohlberg who studied the

moral development of men and developed her study looking at women's moral

development. Gilligan found that females go through three stages of moral development.

These stages can explain how women adapt and develop throughout their college years,

in turn being influenced by their interactions with peers, and that can be a significant

factor when studying young college women and how the media and their peers around

them affect their body image.

Women's Way of Knowing, a book written by Belenky et al. (1986) is based on

their research conducted with women of college age (18-24), and explains how they make

a break with their past life experiences and former relationships and start fresh when they

enter a new part of their lives. These researchers conducted interviews with college

women, and found that women experienced difficulties in knowing who they actually are

when coming to college. That lack of understanding contributed to uneasiness, which

meant they were open to the influences of others telling them who they were (Belenky et

al., 1986). This being open and vulnerable to influence as young college students could

lead women toward trying to make themselves look like what they see in the environment

around them.

Belenky et al's (1986) study described how women wanted to create new

identities, with some participants identifying the process as *re-birth*. "The person I see

myself as now is just like an infant. I see myself as beginning. Whoever I can become,

that's a wide open possibility" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 82). College is often described as

a time of rebirth, a time for individuals to re-invent themselves into whatever they want.

Sometimes this means altering or preserving a certain look or personality, and part of this

is developed through how they are perceived by others. Another woman said, "Now I

feel like I am learning all over again" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 82). This new learning

can be positive and empowering providing a woman with an opportunity for growth and

development; however it can also lead to negative lessons and choices that are not

healthy or beneficial to the woman. Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse (2008) found that college

students, "Find themselves in an environment where direct supervision of their behavior

is typically limited and opportunities to engage in a variety of behavioral risks are often

abundant" (p. 1497).

Arnett (2000) suggests that as students enter college, they become exposed to an

entirely new social atmosphere and use these formative years to identify and explore who

they are or want to become. This period of emerging adulthood offers the most

opportunity for identity formation. The identity formation of a college woman can be

contingent upon the nature of the college environment. The new environment they become a part of in college can provide young women with an array of opportunities for positive involvement; however it can also provide a negative exposure for social comparison (Lindner et al., 2008).

Sociocultural Influence

When leaving for college, students are placed in an environment in which everything is new to them. New faces, places, and experiences can cause confusion. Students often have a hard time finding a balance between their old and new selves (Gilligan, 1982). The environment a person is placed in often has a significant influence on what a person values (Gilligan, 1982). In many circumstances, peers play a very influential role in one's beliefs, especially on outward appearances and behaviors. Schulken and Pinciaro (1997) found that our society emphasizes thinness, and that is thought to play an important role in the maintenance and development of eating disorders. Americans' standards of beauty are based on a body weight that is often unrealistically low and, for many women, unattainable (Schulken & Pinciaro, 1997).

The *Social Comparison Theory* was a concept first explored by Festinger (1954). He explained how individuals evaluate their own opinions and desires by comparing themselves to others. Bessenoff (2006) further examined the *Social Comparison Theory*, and studied how women compare themselves to other women they believe are either similar to them, or socially better then themselves. This study recruited 112 undergraduate women and exposed them to print advertisements depicting the thin ideal to examine the differences in the consequences of thin ideal norms in the media. The hypothesis was that social comparison was expected to mediate the relationship between

thin ideal exposure and body dissatisfaction. It was found that the social comparison

processes mediated the effect of exposure on the thin ideal and significantly affected

body dissatisfaction, weight-related and weight-regulatory thoughts, depression, total

self-esteem, appearance and social self-esteem, and negative mood.

Individuals are conditioned at a very early age to compare themselves to others.

According to Gotz (2008), while growing up children are exposed to different types of

television programming which show women as breathtaking, underweight, sexualized,

and dependent on a man. Although this study was done on what children watch, it

provided evidence that this does affect the development of their brains and influences

how they begin to view the world around them.

In the book *Reviving Ophelia*, Pipher (1998) discussed a woman's physical self

and how society judges girls by their body size and what they wear; and how young

women in turn start to obsess about this, which can cause eating disorders. For example,

a woman living in a sorority house where most of the women are extremely fit, as well as

thin, and who spend a great deal of time talking about looking thin, may feel pressured to

lose weight even if she is already of average weight.

Sides-Moore and Tochkov (2011) found that as women grow up and transition

throughout their lives, they seek friendships with other women of similar body shapes,

sizes, concerns, and dieting behaviors. This can be positive in some regards because the

study found that being competitive with other women of healthy stature could support

healthy lifestyle habits. But it can be negative if there is an association with the thin

ideal. A woman may be unhealthy to reach that thin ideal (Sides-Moore & Tochkov,

2011). The unhealthy competition can result in an increased desire to be thin, which is

possibly an unrealistic body ideal (Paxton, Norris, Wertheim, Durkin, & Anderson, 2005).

Levitt (2004) looked at the drive for thinness in relationship to the fear of fat, and how or why those have such an impact on college women. He studied how both are the reasons there are a large number of college women that had, or had previously, engaged in some form of an eating disorder. It was also found that the fear of non-acceptance by both female peers as well as members of the opposite sex is one of the major driving forces for why women develop an eating disorder in college. Levitt found that women in sororities were more likely to have higher body concerns than women who are not in sororities; more specifically sorority women had a higher drive for thinness, as well as a higher fear of being fat. Levitt found that *social comparison* is associated with peers, as well as the development of college women.

Jones (2001) identified that body shape comparisons have led to greater level of body dissatisfaction, and more specifically that body shape comparisons lead to greater levels of body dissatisfaction. A study done by Cafri, Yamamiya, Brannick, & Thompson (2005) reported that the apparent pressure to be thin was highly associated with body image, so much that as perceived pressure increased, body image satisfaction decreased.

Lindner et al. (2008) passed out questionnaires at a predominantly female university and found very high levels of eating disorders and social comparison. They reported that females participate in social comparison in high levels many times each day with not only their peers, but with women in the media as well. They also found that a college campus can provide a very unique opportunity for social comparison because

young women are concentrated in an area with women their own age; whether those

women are just passing each other on campus, or interacting directly through classes or

other social interaction, that social comparison is happening (Lindner et al., 2008).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) identified that attractiveness is linked to

popularity, dating experience, marriage opportunity, and general life success; and that

how women view one another, as well as how men view them, is a major factor in social

situations. Theorists argue that women are being socially adaptive when they have a

concern with their body image, and that concern has become highly excessive over the

years in our society, which in turn may have implications for eating disorders

(Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Influence of Media on Women's Body Image

There is a growing concern regarding media influence on body image because the

social media is promoting certain body types that cannot be achieved in a healthy way as

being socially ideal and desirable (Sohn, 2009). Lopez-Guimera et al. (2010) stated that

the media is the main social agent in many societies around the world, and that television,

magazines, newspapers, radio, cinema, advertising, the internet, and other forms of *new*

media mainly invade and occupy the population's leisure time, as well as working time.

The central proposal put forth by Dittmar (2005) is that women can, and do, have

negative thoughts about their bodies, which in turn can make them more likely to develop

a disordered eating pattern. Women can feel pressured to achieve that *perfect* body by

exposure to the unrealistic beauty ideals that the media exposes them to, as well as the

friends and family she associates with. In relation to the media, Meng and Bissell (2009),

stated that media is just one of a multitude of factors that may be related to both increases

in disordered eating symptomatology and increases in obesity in children, teens, and

adults. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2000), the cultural ideal of

female beauty portrayed in the media has become increasingly synonymous with ultra-

thinness. Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin (1986) found that glamorous media

models were 20% underweight or more. Dittmar and Howard (2004) stated that women

differ in the extent to which they endorse the thin ideal, but it is important to determine

an exact distinction between women just being aware of the importance of appearance

and thinness, and actually having internalized the thin ideal norms as a personal belief

system. It is important to know the difference because a woman who internalizes the thin

ideal as a personal belief system will do whatever it takes to achieve that thin ideal body.

Research suggests that the media's portrayal of the ultra-slender body as the ideal

image of beauty promotes body dissatisfaction and can result in eating disturbances

among young women (Levine & Smolak, 1996; Streigel-Moore et al., 1986). Krones et

al. (2005) suggested that social comparison and the sociocultural pressure to embrace the

thin ideal in turn makes women feel bad about themselves and their own bodies. But it is

important for women themselves to decide if this stems from real-world interactions with

attractive peers, or if this is due to the exposure of the thin ideal in the media.

Hawkins, Richards, Granley, and Stein (2004) stated that over the last several

decades, the ideal woman who is depicted in the media has become much thinner,

increasing the dispute for the average women and what she should look like. This study

hypothesized that a college woman who is exposed to the media's thin ideal body image

would have an increased body dissatisfaction level, lower self-esteem, greater

internalization of the thin-ideal image, and more eating disorder symptoms when

compared to other women in college who viewed neutral images in the experiment. The results revealed that women who were exposed to the thin ideal media images had increased body dissatisfaction compared to the women who saw the neutral images (Hawkins et al., 2004). Their results supported a previous study done by Stice and Shaw (1994), where thin ideal body images were shown to participants, and the participants were less satisfied with their bodies over participants who were not shown images. Another study by Stice and Shaw (1994) found a significant correlation between the consumption of media that contained the thin ideal image and body dissatisfaction. Levine and Smolak's (1998) study found support relating to the unrealistic thin ideal that women are given in media. Their study found that eating disorders theorists and feminist scholars have stated that for a long time fashion magazines, movies, television, and advertising have personified unrealistic body types which can lead to an unrealistic idea of being thin and that being thin is the most beautiful and acceptable way to look. There is very little doubt that media reaches its audience, and women's magazines, over any other type of mass media form, have been scrutinized for promoting an unrealistic and dangerously thin ideal (Wolf, 1990). Another study, conducted by Harrison and Cantor (1997), identified that the dissatisfaction of body image in women was tied to what women saw, as well as what women identify with. Women were triggered by what was in the print advertisements when looking at popular women's magazines.

Anderson and DiDomenico (1990) performed a study between sexes looking at what they read the most when looking through magazines. They found that magazines read by young females ranging in age of 18-24 most frequently contained more diet articles, and advertisements when compared to those being read by young men, providing

evidence that there is a significant difference in what is advertised to men versus women, and how magazines are influential when it comes to women focusing on changing their shape. Meng and Bissell (2009) found that there is a continued rise of thinness in magazines; several magazine covers month after month highlight the thinnest actress or the dieting strategies of a celebrity.

Several studies have analyzed and confirmed that entertainment television, fashion magazines, and advertisements create a standard body shape (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, & Thompson, 1980; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1990). But, Kilbourne (1999) stated that the ultrathin women models in the media, along with the lack of average and overweight models enforced the notion that there is only *one* acceptable body type for women. Jones (2001) found that perceived physical attractiveness for females has also been shown to be associated with weight and body shape more so than with physical characteristics such as hair, facial features, and so on. In addition, Stice, Spangler, & Agras (2001) found that long-term exposure to fashion magazines has been shown to increase body dissatisfaction, perceived pressure to be thin, dieting, and bulimic symptoms in susceptible adolescents.

E. Henderson-King and D. Henderson-King (1997) looked at the association between the media's idealized image and resulting body dissatisfaction, and if is related to self-perception of attractiveness. Their study focused on women looking at other women who were either the same body shape, or the ideal thin image. They found that the women participants who looked at the ideal thin image and were already thin reported positively, yet it was not found if the media thin ideals influence self-perceptions of

attractiveness and body image. Richins (1991) theorized that the readers or watchers of

media outlets who portray the idealized body image undergo a changed standard or

criteria in which to judge their own physical appearance. It is important to note from

Richins that this standard is impossible to meet, and readers or watchers of the media find

themselves feeling dissatisfied with their own body image. Tyler et al. (2009) found that

in previous research, individuals who are aware of the difference between themselves and

the media thin ideal are more likely to develop a dysfunctional eating pattern.

Meng and Bissell (2009) suggested that media is one of many potential variables

associated with increases in disordered eating, especially among college and adolescent

women. The media portrays the thin ideal so often that it should be responsible for

females having the unhealthy drive to be thin (Meng & Bissell, 2009). Many researchers

on this topic say there is little argument that media content college students are exposed

to, as well as pay most attention to, contains messages promoting the thin ideal (Garner et

al., 1980; Silverstein et al., 1986; Wiseman et al., 1990).

Richins (1991) suggested given that a large number of women are much heavier

than the cultural thin ideal society has given us, social comparisons with the media thin

ideal model should have unfavorable consequences on the self-esteem of heavier women.

Jones (2001) and Thompson, Coovert, & Stormer (1999) each performed correlational

studies that measured the relationship between individual differences in the trend to

compare one's body with others', as well as body dissatisfaction. Their findings were

that women have a higher rate of dissatisfaction when they are socially comparing

themselves to others. In a study by Feingold (1990), it was found that women are

socially valued for their bodies more than men; there is more emphasis on the importance

of their appearance in society.

Dittmar and Howard (2004) performed a study on women's body image. It was

hypothesized that women who have a stronger tendency to compare themselves with the

thin ideal media model may react more strongly to the impact of media images, but this

effect may be strengthened by internalization (Dittmar & Howard, 2004). The study

identified that the thin ideal internalization and social comparisons act as moderators of

media effects. Internalization can be narrowed down from social comparison as a whole,

to women who experience anxiety all because of the thin ideal in the media.

A sample of visually impaired women yielded fewer body image and eating

problems than women with vision, which suggests that exposure to visual images of the

thin ideal may play a role in the development of the need to reach the thin ideal (Baker,

Sivyer, & Towell, 1998). Sohn (2009) stated that the problem for women is that they

look at women in the media as if they are real, therefore attainable, when in reality they

are not. The mass media gives the population unrealistic images of the ideal body shape

which if often unattainable. It is also suggested that media depictions of ideal body

shapes increase the distance in a female's brain between her actual self-perception and

her ideal self.

Body Image Perceptions in College Women

Krcmar et al. (2008) examined how mass media causes internal discrepancies

within the female mindset. These discrepancies are the roles that interpersonal norms and

media norms play that caused lowered self-esteem. Four hundred and twenty-seven

incoming freshmen were surveyed during their orientation, and the results yielded several

findings. It was found that interpersonal norms do have a strong relationship with

esteem, and those young women whose peers and parents valued thinness had lower self-

esteem (Krcmar et al., 2008). Mediated norms (which in this study were fitness, fashion,

celebrity, and news magazines) revealed that there were relationships to weight esteem

issues, as well as feelings of lower self-appearance (Krcmar et al., 2008). It was found

that exposure to the fashion, celebrity, and fitness magazines had a negative effect on the

young women's esteem (Krcmar et al., 2008). This is because a women's own level of

social comparison is regulated by a mechanism in her brain, and that can either reinforce

or undo those effects. Krcmar also identified that the interpersonal norms of parents and

friends regulated the relationship between exposure to thin media images and body

satisfaction. The social environments that one is exposed to can either reinforce or have a

negative impact on body esteem.

A survey given to three different groups on a university's campus by Alexander

(1998) was looking to see if eating disorders affected different groups in a community by

using the Eating Attitudes Test and the Bulimia Test-Revised. A sorority, the

university's dance team, and individual university athletic groups were surveyed.

Researchers hypothesized that sorority women would report more eating disorders than

the other women (Alexander, 1998). Results showed that sorority women did not report

significantly more eating disorders or behaviors than women in the other groups, and they

had less self-doubt and higher insecurity (Alexander, 1998). The study also discovered

that living among a group of women with negative eating habits would enhance the

likelihood that a new member would pick up on the traits over time (Alexander, 1998).

Another study implemented on a college campus was done by Hawks, Madanat, Smith, &

Cruz (2008) discussing the outcomes of a college class at a Western university that offered an elective course on dieting levels, eating styles, and body image among college women. The results showed that an elective course on how to implement healthy lifestyles and body image may improve women's eating styles and body image (Hawks et al., 2008). Women taking this course were already looking to lose weight with various diets, and by teaching the women about theory in the classes, along with everyday techniques they were able to effectively avoid pressure outside of the classroom (Hawks et al., 2008). This study provides evidence that college women's minds are developing and that they are ready for the rebirth to happen. When using the social comparison theory to analyze their study one can see that in this case it had a positive effect (Hawks et al., 2008). The two studies above done by Alexander (1998) and Hawks et al. (2008) showed that women are influenced by other women. In Alexander's study, sorority women picked up on other women's poor eating habits over time, yet in Hawks et al. study women picked up on healthy eating skills from a specific college course. Both of these studies had impacts on women, just in different ways.

Cawley (2001) has suggested that thinness is associated with attractiveness in women. Robles (2009) makes several statements based on previous research she has done related to body image and the impact of media. When women compare their own bodies to that of what they see, they strive to meet societal norms, those created by media, and beyond (Robles, 2009). Additionally, young women have low self-esteem and a distorted body image, which causes the young women to engage in a war with herself; and that drive to become thin may create havoc in a young women's mind and may lead her to have disordered eating patterns to reach the thin ideal (Robles, 2009).

Summary of Literature

According to the literature review, the influence of television and print media are having an effect on a young woman's body image. Who women are surrounded by affect what they consume, what they watch, and what they do. They are affected by the sociocultural impact of the world around them. The development of college women, the influence of the media, and how body image ideals that are internalized by women can all lead to both positive and negative images that the television and print media can give the women in the world around us.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how women perceive their own bodies and how this perception is influenced by print media and television, as well as college women's peers. It was important to understand how women perceive their own body image, and what college women identify as being the greatest influence on this view of self. Previous research studies that have been performed among college-aged women were used to guide the interview process questions to gain valuable information (Harrison and Cantor, 1997; Hawkins et al., 2004; Krcmar et al., 2008).

Methodology

Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to understand an issue from the individual's perspective; it is used to gain insight in to a specific topic (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A lot is known on this topic, as seen in the literature review, but the researcher sought to further understand what influences college women body image. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) stated that qualitative research analyzes and describes a person's individual and collective actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions, as well as benefitting educational practices. This study was designed to gain insight into the individual experience through personal interviews. Qualitative inquiry was used to guide conversations with the young women in this study by asking them open-ended questions and allowing the participants to answer the question fully. Narrative analysis of qualitative study was valuable because the researcher wanted the woman's first-hand account of her own experience (Merriam, 2002).

Personally, I have experienced battles with body image. However, I worked with others throughout this research to stay true to the study and to myself. My personal biases did not cloud my reports or assessment of the findings. I also took time to personally reflect on this topic so that I was able to fully engage the participants in a meaningful way.

This particular study used the narrative analysis of qualitative study, which is the first-person account in story format of one's own experiences (Merriam, 2002). The college women's own experiences related to body image and who influences that perception provided direction for the study. Narrative analyses' share one's own experience, which can then communicate meaning in a deeper way once a person's story has been told (Chase, 1995). Over time, stories have taken center stage as a main way of making sense of the human condition; a story is a simple method of communicating and making meaning essential to the human experience (Merriam, 2002). There are several approaches to analyze narrative stories. This particular study uses the biographical approach, which means that the women's stories were analyzed "in terms of the importance and influence of gender and race, family and origin, life events and turning point experiences, and other persons in the participant's life" (Merriam, 2002, p. 287).

According to Leslie Bloom's excerpt as cited in Merriam's (2002) *Qualitative Research in Practice*, narrative research focuses on the "self", and those central theoretical goals are that narrative research uses personal narratives as data, that the personal narratives are a social critique, and to deconstruct the humanist self (p. 311). This particular study focused on two of those approaches. The first was using the participant's personal stories in the process of data collection. Feminist researchers have

emphasized the importance of using women's narratives as a primary source of data collection. The researcher in this study was able to make sense of the "telling", rather than the "tale" (Merriam, 2002, p. 311). This particular approach was done by interpreting how the college woman has lived and made meaning of her own life. The researcher then interpreted the women's stories through identifying what the words meant through one's own interpretation (Merriam, 2002). The other approach that was of importance to this study was social critique, which means that an individual's own experiences are regulated by the social world and can be interpreted in the social world that she lives in (Merriam, 2002). When society is examined through the lens of an individual, society can be better understood; along with that, narratives can also help construct social actions on both personal and collective levels (Merriam, 2002). The researcher did find comparisons in each woman's story. Each individual was asked to tell her own story and share life experiences from her own unique perspective. Each woman's own rich, descriptive narrative story was shared as findings of the research.

Location

The site for this study was a rural, Midwestern, public comprehensive university with an enrollment of over 9,900 undergraduate students. For the purpose of this study the institution has been given the pseudo name of "Montauk University," which is what it will be referred to as throughout the findings. Students at the institution selected for this study are required to live on campus for at least one year, however there are a variety of living options including traditional residence halls, suite and apartment style housing, and fraternity and sorority residential houses.

Participants

A targeted population for participation included college-aged women in their junior or senior year. Three of the four participants in this study were seniors. Three of the four women had grown up in small towns in the Midwest their entire life, the other moved from a small Midwest town to a major metropolitan Midwest town when she was in high school. All four of these women lived in the residence halls their first year at the institution, Montauk University. All of the women are unique in their own ways and provided great insight for this study. Chapter IV contains each of their stories more in depth. The women have been assigned pseudo names to keep their identities private.

Khloe. Khloe grew up in a small Midwestern town and she is Caucasian. Currently Khloe is a senior at Montauk University and she is majoring in history. Khloe is very involved on Montauk's campus and within the community by volunteering at the local church. She enjoys spending time with her friends and she does not get a chance to watch as much television because of her busy schedule. This school year Khloe lives off-campus in an apartment.

Molly. Molly grew up in a small Midwestern town and she is Caucasian. Molly is an English major and is a senior. She lives in her sorority house within Greek housing at MU, and she has lived there for three years now. Molly enjoys living in the sorority house and she has a single room. She confides in just a small number of close friends and values those friendships. Molly has a longtime boyfriend who goes to another school. Also, she enjoys unique fashion, and looks to both Audrey and Katherine Hepburn for a classic style.

Annie. Annie grew up in small Midwestern town and is Caucasian. She is a communications-public relations major and is a junior. Annie lives in her sorority house in Greek housing this year, and she has a roommate. Annie is involved with her sorority and is aware that she spends a lot of time with those women. Annie is close to her family, especially her mother. She enjoys spending time with her mom shopping and would rather shop with her mother than with her friends.

Tessa. Tessa moved to the Midwest during high school and she is Caucasian. She is a sociology major, so that has given her insight on how she sees the world around her. Growing up, Tessa had a rough time within her family life, which affected her entire life. That has now changed how she sees the world around her. Tessa is a senior who lives off-campus with roommates. She used to be a part of a sorority, but quit when she found out it was not for her.

The term stratification is used to describe how participants were selected and deals with important variables, such as gender, years in school, and age and how that affects the entire participant selection process (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Since this study was looking only at women in their junior or senior year, the stratification was rather narrow. Given that the impact of community and sociocultural environment was important to this study, specific living communities were identified at the institution including: residence halls, sorority houses, and on-campus apartment style living. Selecting women who had exposure to living in communities where multiple women are present was important for this study, and all participants lived in group living situations including sorority houses on campus or apartments off campus. One commonality was that all of the participants had lived on campus in residence halls during their freshman

year. The participants were selected based on their past or current residential experience, in that they had lived on campus for at least one year. The researcher relied on Student Affairs professionals who knew of women who had lived in their residence halls or in sorority housing who would be willing to participate in this study.

The women for the study were between the ages of 18 – 22 and all were enrolled full-time at the university. The women were students at the Midwestern university selected as the location for this study. Identified participants received an email invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A). Participants were required to sign a consent form (Appendix B) as outlined by the Institutional Review Board's protocol. Participants could choose to remove themselves from the study at any point in the process without penalty. The Counseling Center on the university campus had been notified of this particular study, and the women were informed about the services offered through the Counseling Center. At any time before, during, or after the interview, a woman could have utilized the on-campus Counseling Center free of charge if she felt it necessary.

Instrumentation

The interview questions (Appendix C) that were developed allowed the researcher to allow the participants to share their story. When developing the interview questions, the researcher took several considerations into account such as: are these questions open-ended? Do the questions allow for building of rapport and trust between the researcher and student? Do the questions allow the participant to tell their story? The questions were developed using the qualitative language by using wording that would allow for the women to go more in depth as they shared their experiences. The idea that the women would talk more openly once rapport was built was a strong basis for the research. Once

rapport was built with the use of questions using qualitative language, the stories the

women told were invaluable.

Data Collection

The interviews with the participants took place in a private room of the Career

Services Center in the Human Services Center on campus, and the interviews were audio

recorded. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) support the use of audio recordings because the

researcher can focus more on the participant as a subject by maintaining eye contact and

attending to verbal and non-verbal cues without being distracted by taking notes. Only

the researcher and the interviewee were present at the interview and the recording was

saved to a memory card on the researcher's computer. The interview was then

transcribed into an audio file. The computer of the researcher was, and still is, under a

password-protected lock, and only the researcher knows that password. The names of the

participants were changed immediately to protect their identity.

Transcriptions were developed for each interview and shared for review purposes

only with the thesis chair, one other graduate student in the same program, and the

participants that were interviewed. Only those three people, including the researcher,

could look at the transcriptions for validity purposes. All documents were kept in a

locked cabinet that only the researcher had access to. Privacy was the most important

part of this process to keep their identities private, and the interviewee knew that what the

researcher sees and hears was kept private for the trust to be built (Glesne & Peshkin,

1992). The researcher was conscious during the interviews of the women's perspectives,

in addition to the societal-cultural perspectives in which each woman had her own

experiences and how she interpreted her own life (Bloom, 1998). Being conscious during

the interview of all of the perspectives ensured that the researcher's own personal biases

would not cloud the data that was collected.

Treatment and Analysis of Data

Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed by the researcher.

Transcriptions provided the researcher with the words spoken by the participants that

could be further reviewed and analyzed to tell their stories (Merriam, 2002). The

transcriptions of the interviews allowed the researcher to utilize the actual words from the

participants to tell their story. The researcher was ethical in response to the research

collected, meaning that the researcher represented those she was re-telling the story for

and shared what had been learned throughout the process in a conscientious way (Bloom,

1998). The researcher's thesis chair, as well as a peer in the same graduate program,

looked at the interviews to verify and double check the research. Hard copies of the

transcripts were given to the reviewers and returned directly to the researcher. This

ensured validity by having not only the researcher examine the transcripts, but the thesis

chair and graduate school colleague to look at the college women's stories as well. All

documents were kept in a locked cabinet that only the researcher has access to and will be

retained for at least three years after the completion of the research. Audio recordings

were erased after they were transcribed. In three years the research records, including

data and informed consent forms, will be shredded.

Maxwell (2005) explained the importance of validity and ensuring that the

information gathered should be validated by those close to the study, in this case the

thesis chair and graduate school colleague. Maxwell discussed respondent validation and

how this process helps eliminate the researcher from misinterpreting the collected

information. This helped from causing bias in the research, as well as leveling out any

misunderstandings or making sure that the researcher had observed and found the same

information (Maxwell, 2005).

Summary

The study was performed given the parameters that were detailed above in the

methodology section to obtain a greater knowledge about the college women themselves,

and how their body image is affected by the television and print media that permeates our

culture. For clarification to the reader, television and print media influences were

identified by participants.

CHAPTER IV

The Women's Stories

Introduction

This chapter contains the stories of the women who were interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the women's experiences. This is done through gaining insight in to the lives of the participants by asking questions regarding their backgrounds, their personal lives, their daily interactions with the media, and their relationships with their peers (including family and friends). Through the telling of their story we are able to truly understand their individual experiences. This chapter will focus on each of the women's stories only.

Khloe

Growing up. Khloe, a senior in college, is the oldest of the three children in her family. Her two younger siblings are both boys. She is close to both of her parents, however over time she has grown much closer to her mother. She grew up in a small town that was very rural, with a population of approximately 2,000 people. She loves the small town life. While growing up, Khloe and her friends would walk around town, sometimes sipping soda from the local gas station. There was not a lot to do, so she and her friends (male and female) would make their own fun. She is still close to her three best girl friends back at home.

Increasing awareness of body image. Khloe said she first became aware of how she looked around the onset of puberty. In fifth or sixth grade, around the time of her first school dance, she became aware because of what she was going to wear, and how she was going to do her hair and make-up. In seventh grade she watched *MTV's The*

Real World for the first time and began wearing make-up copying what she saw. She was really focused on eyeliner because that is what she noticed the most from the other girls in school, along with *The Real World* stars. Other memorable moments that influenced how she perceived herself included school dances, and especially Prom. She would give in and go tanning, stating that she had to look "super fly" to fit in with the other girls.

Arrival at college. Khloe chose to attend Montauk University (MU) because of a girl in her senior class and because of a guy she had met that was also looking at going to MU. Once on campus, Khloe became very involved in the orientation office by gaining employment there early, as well as with the Methodist church, and other groups on campus. She admits that she has several different friend groups depending on what she has been involved in, but her closest group of friends is from the orientation office since she does the most with them, both at work and outside of work.

Living arrangements at college. Currently at Montauk, Khloe lives off-campus at an apartment complex and she does not enjoy her experience there. She loved living in a residence hall her freshman year because she got along really well with her roommate, and they are still friends to this day. Her sophomore and junior years she lived in apartments on campus, which she enjoyed the first year, however the next year she did not get along with her roommate.

Social groups. Khloe has several friends on campus and is very social. When she arrived to campus, she began to get really involved within the organizations she was a part of to gain more friends. Her main circle of friends have come from her interactions within the orientation office. They love to gather around food, take road trips to nearby

towns to shop, or go out to the bars. Khloe states that there is not a lot to do in her

college town, but she and her friends always seem to make the most of their time and try

to have fun. She values her friendships, and loves having deep conversations with those

friends. Their conversations are more about the meaning of life and how they interpret

what is going on around them.

Social interaction with food. When she gathers with her friends around food they

are conscious of what they are consuming. They will sit around the table at a restaurant

while eating and admit that the food is bad for them and that they should not be eating it,

yet they eat it anyways. Khloe said:

> Recently at Buffalo Wild Wings, everyone was talking about what they
>
> were going to order and we were all saying, "Oh my gosh this is so bad for me. I
>
> shouldn't be eating this much food." But then we went and got frozen custard
>
> after dinner anyways. It's always those little comments like I shouldn't be eating
>
> this, but I'm going to eat it anyways kind of thing.

> Those conversations make her feel like she is pigging out. She says, "As a

woman, it is perceived that you should not be eating a lot of food, and then when you do

you are pigging out." Khloe talked about how the media shows a lot about dieting and

that in order to fit an image of what a woman should look like that you have to diet.

Khloe shared that meal times are very rushed due to her busy schedule. She finds

herself grabbing lunch in the student union or eating something really quick back at

home. Even with her busy schedule she tries to eat healthy and so she will try to grab the

healthiest option. To her, "healthy" means whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. She tries

to only drink water and coffee. In an effort to stay healthy, Khloe goes to the gym on

campus about three times a week and runs.

Working out. After gaining 15-20 pounds during her junior year, Khloe began to

recognize the weight gain and has been trying to run more. She gained the weight from

stress that she encountered from things going on back home and at school. At first she

just ate and did not really do anything about it, then she noticed the changes in her body

that come with gaining weight. That is when she started running and training for a half

marathon that she hopes to compete in next spring. She realized that she wanted to feel

better about herself, and did not have to rely on anyone else to make her feel good about

herself. She said physically, because of her weight loss over this past year, she sees

herself as more of an in-shape person that is attractive and pretty. Khloe described

herself as Jessica Biel in regards to looking athletic, and not super skinny, but she has

muscle on her body. She does not think she is the most attractive person ever, but she

does think she is pretty. She used to rely way too much on people to feel good about

herself. Their comments and what they would say influenced how she felt about herself,

but now she depends on herself for her own happiness. She said:

> I do not rely on other people anymore. I think that I have just accepted the fact
>
> that it should not be a normal thing for people to say you look pretty today, or
>
> "oh, you look really great." You should just feel good about yourself naturally. I
>
> used to depend on people to tell me those things to feel better about myself, but
>
> then I realized why? I can feel good about myself all on my own, and I started
>
> doing that.

Media interaction. Khloe maintains a very busy schedule, thus she does not have a lot of time to watch television, or read magazines. If she gets a chance to watch television, she watches shows online like *Chicago Fire*, or *Once Upon A Time*. She hated admitting that she only watches those television shows for the hot men that star in them. She stated that the shows have really good plots and they can keep her attention, but it is the men that draw her to the program.

Khloe identified that the media does influence body perception:

The media shows a lot about dieting and that you should diet to fit the image of what a woman should look like. And so when you do eat after seeing those advertisements, it makes you feel self-conscious for filling your body with what you want.

Even when Khloe is out shopping with her friends they ask one another how the outfit looks on them, whether it flatters their figure, or does it make them look fat? They ask themselves those questions to make sure that they really want to buy that outfit. Those interactions with peers influence her so much that she asks herself those questions personally when shopping, or even when trying on her own clothes in her apartment.

Khloe describes herself as a nice person, more along the lines of a people-person who gets along with everybody. She did not want to come off as conceited, but she really thinks of herself as a nice person, outgoing, and a people-pleaser. When asked what feeds the perception of how she looks, Khloe stated:

Definitely the media. For example on *E! Online* today, I was just looking at it and they have all of these pictures of these celebrities and how skinny they are. So of course you are comparing yourself to them and how beautiful they are because *E!*

Online tells me so, so I need to look like that to be beautiful. Another example is with the television shows I do watch; all you see are the same kind of women. These women have long hair, brunette or blond, they are very skinny, they are usually tan—the more exotic looking the better. It is not realistic at all, and so that is just frustrating to see all of the time to have to live up to that.

Khloe feels self-conscious because she has short hair, and the media portrays the ideal image of a woman as having long hair. She believes that the media is not realistic at all, which is frustrating to her as a woman. Khloe gets frustrated because as a college woman she sees herself as a role model to the young girls at her church, yet the young girls are being exposed to television shows with the unrealistic ideal image of what women should look like.

Khloe believes that women are basing their perceptions of themselves entirely on unrealistic and unattainable things.

Some women drive themselves crazy, and I think people do try to be that perfect person. And at the end of the day, no matter what they do to themselves, they are not going to feel good about themselves until they really realize how great they are just as they are.

The media's influence. Khloe puts a lot of effort into how she looks before going out to impress not only men, but other women as well. Khloe gives light to the fact that ever since she became single things have changed for her in regards to how she looks when going out. She puts extra effort into looking good, which is fueled by wanting a partner. She believes that she is trying to find the perfect guy, in addition to looking good in front of the other college women who are sizing her up at the bars while she is

out. She is more comfortable with herself now while out at the bar, but she is also sizing other women up and down wondering why they are wearing what they are wearing. Although first and foremost she is trying to attract the men for a partner. At the end of the day though, Khloe feels the best when she is naturally herself. She wants to not have to put on a lot of make-up and still feel comfortable in her own skin.

Molly

Growing up. Molly, a senior in college, grew up in a very protective environment in a small town. She has an open relationship with her parents, and is especially close with her mother. Her parents have supported her through the years as well. She grew up in an older neighborhood with a lot of retired neighbors. She lived within walking distance of her high school, and called high school "interesting." In high school, Molly was a cheerleader, an office worker, a member of Model United Nations, and a member of the choir. She was incredibly busy, which meant she was a part of many groups, but claimed to have only a few close friends. She had two close friends and a boyfriend with whom she spent a lot of time. Within her small town she and her friends would go to the bowling alley or the movie theatre for entertainment. "There was not much else to do besides drive around and waste gas." Molly claims to do nothing with her life besides hanging out with her friends and by staying involved in high school activities.

Increasing awareness of body image. Molly first became aware of how she looked in junior high when she became a cheerleader. Her mother bought her make-up to use for games only, however being a young girl meant she wanted to try putting the make-up on, although she had no clue what she was doing. She wore it to school one day

and felt the eyes of the students all looking at her. She had eyeliner all over her face up to her eyebrows, and thought she looked fine. In that moment she understood the purpose of make-up and the point of changing your look for a purpose. Regarding that experience Molly said:

> I never really thought about make-up or clothes or anything at that point. And then, you know, you are starting to wear make-up and you are starting to care about what other people think because you are putting in all of this effort and you are like, 'well someone has got to notice.' And at the same time you are starting to notice other people and how much make-up they are wearing and what clothes they are wearing. I think in general junior high is that stage for everyone.

Arrival at college. Considering Molly had grown up in a very small hometown, coming to college provided new and different experiences. One of the first experiences she had when she first came to MU was a crazy yelling situation between girls on her residence hall floor. Cuss words were thrown around amongst the craziness and loud music. Molly nervously remained in her room curled up in her bed watching a movie and eating popcorn just thinking that she was going to die. Looking back now she is thankful for the interesting people she encountered and the diversity she has experienced, but she is glad she has lived in Greek house ever since.

Living arrangements at college. Currently, Molly lives on-campus in a sorority house, which she has lived in three out of the four years she has been at Montauk, and she loves it there. She resides in a single room in the sorority house and she absolutely loves it. She has a suitemate in the room next to her, and so they just share a bathroom. Her suitemate is actually a woman from her pledge class who was her roommate her

sophomore year. They got along so great that they decided to be suitemates the past two

years in the house. Molly claims that in the sorority house there is never a dull moment,

and she feels as if she has a responsibility living in the house given she has been an

executive officer for over two years now. Being an officer she says she has to be on her

best behavior since all of the eyes in the house are watching you.

Social groups. Molly's closest friends on campus are her suitemate in the

sorority and another best friend outside of the sorority. She is close to her sorority

sisters:

> But I keep my best friends close because things get tough sometimes, and I would
>
> rather be best friends with those two then close to my entire sorority and not be
>
> able to lean on the core girls when I really need them kind of thing.

Molly really appreciates these close girl friends that she has because they are very

driven and ambitious in a different way than her old best friends from back home:

> They are going after college and they are going after a career and going after what
>
> they are interested in. And I love that. I like that my friends now are really
>
> sincere about life, they are not out getting wasted every night and popping out
>
> babies. They actually have a purpose and drive in life. That is a common thing
>
> that we can come together about and that drive keeps us going and we support one
>
> another with this crazy life in college.

Social interaction with food. Molly and her friends have coffee dates, dinner

dates, and they go out for Mexican food "too often." When they eat, instead of being

worried about what each other eat, they are focused on what they drink. She and her

closest friends look forward to these weekly outings on Friday nights because they get a

large margarita and just talk about how terrible or great their weeks were, about class,

personal lives—anything and everything is discussed:

> We call these dinner dates on Friday nights 'bitch fests', where we can just go and
>
> bitch about life and not be judged for what we are going to say. We talk about
>
> those group projects, boyfriends, professors, siblings, and sorority life. Basically
>
> just whatever we need to get off our chests, we do so in that bitch fest over
>
> margaritas. Or just in general when we are eating.
>
> Food is not on their minds, and food is not the priority, but more of the culture

established that comes with these weekly Friday night adventures.

Media Interaction. Molly interacts heavily with her sorority sisters around

media, whether it is watching movies, television shows or reading magazines, she is

interacting with her peers.

Movies. Molly's sorority sisters have been making a point to have a "Hot Man

Movie Night", watching *Magic Mike, Chasing Liberty, 10 Things I Hate About You, The*

Vow and other chick flick classics. They love the attractive men in the movies. They do

not talk about the actual movie; they usually have random conversations about class or

something someone did that is completely irrelevant to what they are watching. They

even joke around and make fun of how the actresses or actors dress or how they talk.

Television. In regards to television viewing, Molly and her friends love to watch

Vampire Diaries and *Pretty Little Liars*. They mainly talk about the clothes though,

especially during *Pretty Little Liars*. Molly says that Spencer is her favorite character on

Pretty Little Liars because of her clothes; she absolutely adores her style and how she

dresses. She feels like she can identify with Spencer as a character specifically because

she is really busy, and she is always trying to have her nose in everything. They also talk about the men on the show and how cute they are and they focus on who they should be dating and why are they dating that particular girl. Those conversations can get pretty serious, and she is not really sure why. They just enjoy talking about the relationships and fashion.

Magazines. Molly has been a long time subscriber to *Cosmopolitan* and over time has changed her perspective on the magazine. She used to be a die-hard reader back in high school, stating she would "Read it, breathe it, it was like my bible." Now that she has gotten to college she still enjoys reading it, but she has become more skeptical of its content. She said it makes her angry:

> You know, *What Facial Expressions To Not Make Him Angry*, or *What Touches That Will Make Him Forgive You* I feel like Cosmo has been on this platform for promoting strong women, but now they are talking about how to make your man happy. Not about making you stronger as a woman – it's all about pleasing your man now. And that is frustrating.

Back in high school she did not really have a lot of life experiences, so she really turned to *Cosmo* for everything. But now that she has had her own life experiences she understands things differently. She referred to her four-year relationship and how she is always reading the articles questioning them:

> I am reading a lot of these things and they are like how to keep your man. I am always like that is a lie…that is a straight up lie. Knowing the difference now in life is huge when reading Cosmo.

Having experienced many new things beyond high school, her perspective of *Cosmo* has changed. She no longer finds it to be a strong women's magazine anymore.

Sense of fashion. Molly has a unique style of dress and loves to shop at thrift stores, finding good deals on vintage clothing items. Molly has a different way of shopping for clothes – she looks for ways to make an outfit complete, as in accessories and bringing a look together. She is proud of the vintage items that she finds and has a classic wardrobe style. Women in her sorority house are always asking her why she takes so much time to get ready, but to Molly it does not take a lot of time because it is what she has always done and she enjoys it. She sees clothes differently from the girls around her since she has grown up as the type of girl that looks at the clothes and thinks what else do I have in my closet that would go with this? When shopping, everyone compliments each other saying that this is cute, that is cute—but she is thinking, how are you going to actually wear it? How are you going to plan that outfit? She attributes her different style from always having a love for fashion.

Molly does not have a lot of free time, but when she does she unwinds by watching television. She recently started watching Sex and the City from the beginning and she "loves the fashion and Carrie Bradshaw's uniqueness." Also in her free time she will hang out with her sorority sisters or will go to a friend's house outside of the sorority. Sometimes she feels like she needs to escape from the sorority house because you can only really talk about the things with the same person so many times.

Food consumption. In regards to what Molly eats she was honest and said she usually just throws something in the microwave while doing homework. She participates in a lot of group projects, so she is very busy. She is in a hurry whenever she eats, and

she usually shops at Wal-Mart for groceries that are fairly inexpensive and frozen. She said:

> Frozen food is easily one of my best friends since I am always in a hurry and if I
>
> do not have time to stop at the cafeteria for breakfast or late at night, I always
>
> have to have frozen food in my room.

The media's influence. When asked to describe herself, Molly said, "I love old movies, like Audrey Hepburn, black and white movies. I love old things." When asked what feeds this perception, she said:

> I have always loved clothes, and that comes from the Audrey Hepburn idolization
>
> I have, and how I was brought up. My grandparents always told me, 'you have to
>
> look like a lady.' So I was raised like that, which I do not have a problem with. I
>
> do not necessarily pay attention to current media. I am more the black and white
>
> movies kind of girl – Audrey and Katherine Hepburn type of girl. So I am
>
> influenced by that. I guess that is how I perceive beauty, by looking at those
>
> women. Instead of current women in the media – I mean my views on current
>
> women, especially in the media are not good. I am not exactly proud of how a lot
>
> of the women are portrayed in the media.

Molly sees that women are barely clothed in advertisements trying to sell a watch or a car, she then thinks that is awesome that they can wear a watch, but can those women wear something besides a watch? Or can they actually sell a car without a swimsuit? The media is objectifying women and it is bad for young girls to look at that, and it does not make sense to her. Molly thinks that strength does not necessarily come from your chest size, but that it is more about class and how classy a woman can be. Class, to her, means

that women have a quiet strength about them. Molly believes that college women now are loud and boisterous, which she says there is nothing exactly wrong with that, she just prefers the classy kind of strength found in older times.

Comparison to other women. In coming to college, Molly talked about how people naturally want to fit in when they come to college, as it is a natural thing. A memorable moment that sticks out to Molly in regards to fitting in was when she was at her boyfriend's fraternity house at another university:

> There was a picture of me and one of his brother's girlfriends. I am looking at this picture and this girl is gorgeous, stick thin, long hair and I look like a troll. And I was like what was I thinking? But the funny part was, before I had left the house that night to go to this party, I was like I'm sure, I like the way I look. And so seeing yourself juxtaposed to somebody else you automatically see your flaws because they do not have that particular flaw that you see in yourself. Granted, she may have looked at the picture and seen something totally different, like whatever it is she does not like about herself. But I think different people look at pictures differently.

Annie

Growing up. Growing up Annie maintained a strong relationship with her parents; she referred to her mother as one of her best friends. Her father was a strong supporter of her active sport lifestyle in high school. She felt as if her small town was a place where everyone knew each other. The kids that she started school with during elementary school she ended school with in high school. Annie had the same group of five girlfriends throughout her entire time growing up, and even now those are her still

some of her best friends. Growing up she was an athlete and felt like she was in the

limelight because everyone knew who she was from playing sports. She felt pressure

from everyone in the town to always do great in sports.

Increasing awareness of body image. Growing up, Annie said she first became

aware of how she looked in eighth grade. She remembers that she wasn't big, but she

didn't feel small, and she started comparing herself to the other girls. She would

compare features on her body to features on other girls' bodies and wish she looked like

those other girls. She knew in her head she wasn't that large, however a boy in high

school would say to her, "come here fatty" or joke around with her and her friend about

being fat, which made her question why he was saying that. Playing sports allowed

Annie to eat whatever she wanted and still maintain an athletic figure, yet when this guy

would call her fat she would question her own perception. As she moved into high

school, she started interacting more with the older girls and that is when she really started

to care about her appearance.

In high school Annie would eat at McDonalds and her friends would make fun of

what she ate and joke that she was going to order the entire menu, making her feel very

self-conscious. She remembers a specific time:

> I got a new pair of jeans and they were looser, and I remember one of my flirty
>
> guy friends coming up to me and he asked, 'Are you losing weight because your
>
> jeans are really loose…are you losing your butt?' And I said, 'No, what the
>
> heck?' And I was thinking, 'Oh shit, I had to get like a bigger size because of my
>
> butt.' You know, people just notice that kind of stuff and it makes me wonder
>
> why they notice? And why do they have the guts to come up to somebody and say

things like that? I would never have the guts to go up to someone and say rude things like that.

She became very aware of the fact that people were looking at her body and making comments about the way she looked.

Arrival at college. Annie, a junior in college, selected her university after talking with her high school guidance counselor, who was also her cousin and a graduate of the selected college. Annie lived in a large residence hall her freshman year, and then her sophomore year she moved off-campus with a group of four other girls. She resides in her sorority house with one other roommate, as well as two suitemates next door with whom she shares a bathroom.

Living arrangements at college. Annie describes the sorority house as catty at times, but was surprised that there was not more drama that came with living in the house. Annie describes how hard living with other girls can be, sharing such a small space after having her own bedroom the last two years. However, Annie and her roommate get along really well and it's a lot easier than she thought it would be living together in a close space. Her roommate is always at her boyfriend's house, so she gets a lot of time in her room to herself.

Social groups. Her freshman year she met her two best friends who encouraged her to rush the sorority. Throughout her sorority experience she has made even closer bonds with her sisters. As a group of girls they go out together, watch movies and just hang out. There are mandatory events within the sisterhood where they all come together for one night, but mostly she is with her main group of girls within the sorority. When it comes to the relationship she has with her roommate, they usually go out and grab a bite

to each together. Anytime Annie and her roommate are in their room together they will

try and do homework or just catch up on life. They talk about what happens within their

sorority, or outside of the sorority (family problems, boyfriend problems, etc.).

Since coming to college, Annie's friend group has changed just slightly. Her

friend group seems to have a type:

> There has never been a whole bunch of diversity…or like I have never had…I
>
> guess like…obese friends. I guess that sounds weird, but I mean I feel like you
>
> hang out with the people who are like you, kind of. I mean I do not know how to
>
> say it, but that is the type of friends I have, the ones like me. I just noticed
>
> recently that one of my best friends is extremely tiny, and I mean like I am not an
>
> extremely tiny girl, but I guess I have never had like large, large, girls as friends.
>
> But I do not have anything against that[pause] you know?

Social interaction with food. When Annie and her friends are eating out they will

often talk about what they are eating and how bad it is for them, yet they will do it again

and again. Annie thinks the conversations are supposed to be funny, but realizes that she

"shouldn't be eating this or it is bad for you, or good thing we worked out together, or

good thing I didn't work out today because this was a waste of a workout."

Media interaction. Annie and her friends enjoy watching movies together;

recently they watched *Magic Mike* and drooled over Channing Tatum's good looks.

They also enjoy watching *Gossip Girl* and end up talking about the cattiness of the

characters, or how someone is trying to take down someone else on the show. They

wonder why the girls and boys on those shows are so mean to each other. They also

discuss the fashion that the women are wearing on the show.

Annie reads magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Seventeen*, and other women's magazines. She reads the health articles, especially the articles about working out. With her friends she talks about the clothes that are in the magazine and the outfit ideas that they take from them and apply to their own style. Annie said, "Mostly we just talk about the girls' experiences and the stories that we read, the clothes, the food, the fashion, and working out."

Fashion sense. Annie loves to go shopping with her mom at stores like Forever 21, H & M, and Charlotte Rousse. She would rather go with her mom because it is more fun to shop, and they just talk about the random things that happened that day. And sometimes they do talk about the clothes that they are trying on, commenting on the fit of the items, are they too loose, too tight or something like that.

Body image. Annie values her own personal time to herself; she feels like she is always spending the days with people, especially living in a sorority house, so it gets hard to find alone time. When she is alone she will watch television, do her homework or just relax. She tries to work out three or four times per week on her own. Since she is so busy, she usually eats alone, but during dinnertime she will be social with her sisters or go out to the kitchen and make something.

Annie stays healthy by working out and trying to eat healthy. She doesn't starve herself, and since coming to college she has maintained her weight from high school. Eating healthy to her means:

> I try not to eat big portions and I will not eat fast food all of the time, even though I love it. I will control myself. I eat a salad instead of a burger. Instead of eating a fatty snack like ice cream, cake, or sweets, I will choose a healthier option.

She is not one of those girls that goes to the gym for hours on end since she clearly does not have time for that in her schedule. If she can get some exercise in then she is fine.

I feel that I could not say I am extremely happy with my body. Although I feel like I should be happy with my body, but then I realize ehhhh, it's okay. I have a skinny-smaller waist, and my bottom half is just bigger. And it is fine, because I know I'm not huge. I am around 5'4, so I am a little short. I am not an extremely skinny girl, I do have curves, and I am fine with that.

Annie wishes she was smaller because when she sees other girls going out on the town in college they will show their stomachs or have tight clothes on and she thinks to herself that she could not wear those clothes because her stomach does not look as flat as that. Or when she is at the gym she sees super skinny girls working out and thinks to herself that they spend a lot of time at the gym like her, so why can't she be as skinny as them or get that good of results. At the end of the day she is who she is and there is no changing that. She has realized though that everyone has a different body type, and so she has accepted the one she has. She is comfortable with herself and she has a healthy perspective because she knows that not everyone can be a size 2 or 0, and you can be the size you are and be happy with that:

My roommate (now) looked at me one time and said, 'You're the perfect skinny' or something like that. She said, 'You're not like super skinny, but you're not like fat, but you have curves.' That is the only real moment I can think of how I perceived myself because of what she said to me. Although when I am out, guys will come up to me and say something about my butt or whatever.

When her roommate called her the "perfect skinny" it made her question herself:

Sometimes I think, yes I am skinny, and other times I am like no, I'm not. I am

curvy, so sometimes it really just depends on the day for me and how I feel. Or

what I'm wearing, because some days I am happy with my body and other days I

am like no, I'm not happy.

She loves to spend quality time with her sorority sisters because they do not care

what she looks like. She can wear whatever she wants and just let her hair down and

relax. Before going out with her sisters though, she needs that reassurance about her

outfit. She needs her sisters to say that they like her outfit:

Sometimes you can tell when your friends are being judgmental, for instance

when we are getting ready to go out and they say, 'Oh, I like your outfit'. Then

that is a good thing. But if they do not say anything, it makes me think, 'Does no

one like my outfit or what?' Or 'Do I not look good?'

Feeling your best. She feels good about herself when she looks the most

presentable to the public, like having her hair and make-up all done before she leaves the

house. Or she feels good about herself personally when she is doing something that

really matters, usually outside of her busy schedule; if she is making a difference or doing

something for someone else she feels her best.

Tessa

Family life. Tessa had a difficult life growing up. Her biological father was an

alcoholic and her real mother had mental health issues. Tessa was abused, along with her

brother, as she grew up. Tessa tried becoming emancipated starting at the age of 14, and

by the time she was 16 she was officially emancipated and a ward of the state. She

wanted to get away from the unhealthy environment she lived in, and soon her aunt and

uncle who could provide her with a more stable environment adopted her. They had two

sons, both older than Tessa, and biologically this group of people are extended family

members, but she now refers to them as her mother, father, and her two brothers.

Moving. The transition was hard for Tessa, coming from her hometown to her

current town because Tessa's previous town was poverty-stricken, and she moved to a

wealthier suburb. Until the age of 16, she grew up in a very small town, and her high

school was around 300 to 400 people, but when she moved in with her adopted mother

and father, the high school they put her in was much larger with over 1,200 students, and

she experienced culture shock.

Body image. In her original hometown, appearance and the types of clothes one

wore was of little importance, but in her new town greater importance was placed on

what you were wearing and where you lived and what your parents did. This is when

Tessa began to identify different styles and societal pressures to look a certain way. She

would eat lunch alone in the bathroom at her new high school because she felt like she

had no friends and she did not know what she was supposed to do since the lunch rooms

were so large, four total, compared to the one small one back in her home state.

Increasing awareness of body image. When Tessa reflected back on when she

first became aware of the way she looked she references her experiences in Junior High

where she went through an awkward transition phase from sixth to seventh grade. In her

elementary school the girls would wear boys clothes and even dirty clothes. But in

middle school she realized she did not fit in with this approach to dress.

In seventh grade she was teased a lot for having a boy haircut, for not wearing name brand clothes, and for not even knowing what name brand clothing was. She was teased for not carrying a purse, and for having "lesbian tendencies." She was bullied so much that students started to realize that they were getting to her. Luckily her move to a new town allowed her to get away from all of that bullying, but she noticed the pressures even more in her new town with the suburbia lifestyle. She did not fit in again and this new mold was more feminine and she was not wearing feminine things which meant that she again was not part of the social norm around her in high school.

She realized that girls were straightening their hair, wearing make-up, jewelry, name brands, and appeared slimmer. Tessa was not overweight at that time, but she still felt as if she wasn't the same smaller size as the other girls. Tessa also was not tanning or shaving her legs yet, and found it weird that girls were already doing those things in middle school. Because of this, and the issues Tessa faced at home, she had a difficult time fitting in and making friends in both towns. Finally, she decided she was going to sit down and make friends one day at lunch, so she did. The girls she sat with were the typical suburbia, perfect girls, and Tessa was not. She felt the pressure of girls in her new state always wearing leggings, Ugg boots, and scarves, not jeans, t-shirts and hoodies. This style was something she was not used to and the big transition of how people dressed at her new school was more sophisticated rather than her usual high school attire.

Arrival at college. When asked about why Tessa chose MU for college, she explained that she actually applied to several different colleges in the state. She got accepted to quite a few of them and ended up choosing Montauk. MU had a great financial aid package, which made it the cheapest, on top of having textbook rental

(which she loved). Tessa joined a sorority when first arriving at college because she wanted to get out of the residence halls immediately, which ended up being a bigger problem than anticipated.

Learning experience. While at MU, she lived in the residence halls, her sorority house, an apartment complex, and now she is renting a house with two of her girlfriends. In joining the sorority she thought it would allow her to get to know a group of women she would develop relationships with that would last over time. The women in the sorority were friendly at first, so she really liked her new member experience. Soon though, she had some misunderstandings with members in the sorority that caused her to feel ostracized and alone. This eventually led to her leaving the sorority. She then lost those social connections within the sorority, and so she ended up living in an apartment complex for a couple of years with new acquaintances. Now, in her senior year, she lives in a house with two other women off-campus.

Social groups. Tessa's closest group of friends at Montauk is her "nerd friends". These friends are a group of students at MU who meet weekly and make up the *Society for Free Thought*. The reason she feels so close to this group is because she has a lot of independent thoughts, and she likes change, and a lot of her friends groups do not approve of her changing of groups. But her "nerd" friends appreciate her challenging thoughts and her free, independent spirit. She really likes to think about things, granted she does like friends who care about hair and beauty and boys, but she really appreciates friendships that can challenge her in different aspect and appreciate her need for changing the world. She does not like to get judged because she cannot handle it, so the *Society For Free Thought* on campus really does appreciate her for who she really is. Her

'"nerd" friends understand that life is about real beauty and that you do not have to be a certain size to fit in. Compared to her other friend group, who Tessa refers to as "non-critical thinkers", they talk about weight and wanting to be slimmer. As well as what the media puts out there and the pressures that it gives women.

Social interaction. Tessa and her friends do lots of different things together. They do everything from hiking, to shopping, to drinking. She also loves to volunteer for Big Brothers Big Sisters, and for an organization called Girls on the Run, which promotes forward movement and positive body image in young girls.

Media Interaction. According to Tessa, her "non-critical thinking" friends fit the mold of what television ads are trying to attract. Those advertisements get to those type of people, who do not use critical thinking skills (in her opinion), and she does not like to be divulged in that kind of atmosphere. Tessa would much rather hang out with friends who appreciate her need for an educational experience.

Movies. Tessa likes to watch movies with her friends, and when they are watching movies they usually watch a chick flick. While watching the chick flick they are discussing why the main actress is not attractive enough for the lead male. Recently they were watching *The Vow* and *Dear John*, both starring Channing Tatum. Tess and her friends agreed that the lead actresses in both films were not pretty enough to be in a movie with him. They pondered why they don't cast prettier girls with such attractive men. To Tessa:

> Being pretty means different things and has different contexts. I define it in
>
> different ways depending on who I am with. In the social world, pretty would be
>
> like the typical dominant features. Long, flowy hair, defined eyebrows, defined

cheekbones, and perfect white teeth. But in the movie, Dear John, the girl was

more homier – casual looking, 'who the guy would choose for a wife, not like

fantasy pretty'. I feel models are more fantasy pretty, but I guess the homier look

is more realistic I guess.

Magazines. Tessa states that she and her roommates talk about the

advertisements in the fashion magazines they read. Particularly the DOVE®

advertisements with plus-size models are talked about, and how those advertisements are

trying to attract people:

> These advertisements have been on television and we talk about the pressure of
>
> being told we are not thin enough, and those conversations happen and my
>
> roommate tells me that she thinks those advertisements actually give a bad image
>
> to woman. She says these advertisements are making a point to show that there is
>
> an opposite. Yes, these are fat and skinny girls, and in the DOVE® commercials
>
> they showcase both sides. But DOVE® is trying to say that the bigger girls are
>
> still pretty, and should still be included, but instead it focuses on how big they are
>
> and that makes it worse for them. And I do not think that at all, I think that the
>
> more they are in the media, the more the media accepts it from the exposure they
>
> are given.

Tessa's other roommate always gets involved in the conversations, and since she

is skinnier than the other two, she just thinks that everyone should be healthy, regardless

of what pressures the media puts on you. Tessa tries arguing what healthy really is, since

she is a bigger girl, she still feels like she is healthy.

Food consumption. When Tessa goes out to eat with her friends, they recognize what food is bad for them and what is not. But they are going to eat it anyway, even with the guilty conscious hanging over them. Tessa feels guilty when she eats bad food, and she does not like being limited to a certain standard. She says, "I feel food is meant to fuel your body, not for taste. So I feel guilty that I do not like the taste of things that I am actually putting into my body, instead of just for pleasure." Tessa shares that the guilt over food comes from her family and the media. Tessa's two brothers are really fit and they work out a lot. Her mother is very "opinionated" and puts a lot of pressure on her to be a certain size. Her mom thinks that, "I have carious health problems, but nothing too serious. She just attributes them to me being overweight." Her mother does not understand that she eats healthy, and she still works out to maintain her health. Tessa says that the doctor tells her she is perfectly healthy, even with the extra weight. She recognizes that if she ate healthier foods she may be skinnier and this may make her family happier and to feel less guilt.

Food concern. Tessa's schedule is rather busy causing her to not have consistent eating patterns:

I usually wake up around 7:30 am and I have my first class at 9 am. So I go the entire day, either in class or working, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays I coach Girls on the Run at 3 pm, and then usually go straight to work until 10 pm. So I am usually on the go all day on campus, then off campus to work, so my meals are whenever I can fit them in at the moment. So if I have 30 minutes free and I am close to the food court on campus, and I will stop there. But if not, then I have cheese and crackers in a drawer at work. So I will eat something like that, or I

will drink a protein shake. Sometimes I do not eat the entire day, or sometimes I will wake up starving in the middle of the night and drink orange juice and have a bowl of cereal. My eating is never on schedule. It is very sporadic, if at all. I just eat whatever, wherever, if at all. So not much thought goes into it. It is normally whatever is fast and easy at the time since I do not have time.

She does not get any alone time either given her busy class and work load schedule. If she does get the chance for free time, she will read books geared towards her major that challenge her intellect.

Fashion sense. Tessa has a hard time shopping for clothes, and when asked where she buys her clothes she can't really go to the actual store and buy clothes because the clothes do not come in her size. Tessa says:

I get really frustrated at clothing places because I feel like I do not fit into the clothes and they do not look good or fit my body size. But I do not like telling my friends that, so I would rather just order my clothes online so I am not embarrassed in the actual store in front of my friends all the time. I of course still go to be social, but I usually just shop for accessories, like necklaces, bracelets, scarves, rings…not the clothes since they do not actually fit.

She will usually blame not buying clothes on not having enough money, when in reality the clothes just do not fit. When she is with her friends they talk about what looks cute, and how certain girls should not wear certain types of clothing because of their body size, like leggings and on skinny or larger girls. Tessa believes:

If you like a particular kind of clothing you should be able to wear it regardless, as long as your body parts are not hanging out. And there are a lot of people that

think that a lot of clothes should be only worn on certain types of bodies, not even small, thin girls think that; but even some big people think that certain clothes should not be worn be a short girl or a tall girl. Women are always judging.

Society seems to tell women what they should wear, and Tessa believes that you should wear things you are comfortable in. Tessa herself could fit into Abercrombie and Fitch for a certain part of her life, and so she would always try and fit the mold of society. Ever since coming to Montauk, her "nerd" friends have changed that focus and allowed her to focus on what actually appeals to her.

Media pressure. Tessa says, "There is this pressure of always wanting to be thinner though and wanting to fit into more clothes." She feels, "If I had no pressures about my physical body, then more people would see what I have offer on the inside." She feels the need to be thin because of the pressure that the media puts out there:

> I do not know if it is something I believe because the media tells me that, or if I want to be small for me. I think I want to be thinner, but really I just want to fit in thinner clothes. And I hate how the social world designs thinner clothes – like obviously if I did not have the pressure of thinner clothes, I would not have the pressure to want to be thin. Society has this thin persona because of the clothes and sizes they advertise as being thin versus overweight.

Society gives the public a mold of what Tessa is supposed to be, and she feels like she does not fit that mold and frustrations build because she does not fit the molds of clothing, the lifestyle of how she should look. When Tessa does not fit this mold of society, she becomes very aware of that.

Society's mold. Recently Tessa was out running and a man yelled out his window while driving by her, "Why don't you try the tread climber instead!" She said she was on the main road of Montauk's campus when this was yelled. She continued to run, but it really got to her how society disapproves of her body size and being overweight. When she looks at Facebook, Tessa sees herself as the larger one and feels uncomfortable when she has to order the XL shirt size:

> I get that society does not approve my body size since I am overweight, but for someone to yell that? And then it bothers me when I look on Facebook and see myself with my other friends and I am always the bigger girl in the pictures. Out of my friends I am always the biggest, and it bothers me. I feel like I am ruining the pictures, or that you can notice that I am the odd girl out. I can't even shop for clothes since my size is not on the rack. I see it everywhere – my family tells me I 'could be a lot prettier if...' and it is always about my weight from my mom. My mom always asks out loud in front of everyone why I don't have a boyfriend. And I say the reasons why I do not think I have one, and then they say their reasons, which are always because I am overweight.

Family pressures. The relationship with her family has played a heavy part in how Tessa sees herself. The pressures of weight come constantly from her mother. Tessa attributes not having a boyfriend to her independent spirit, but the pressure from her family tells her something different. In Tessa's family, her older brother plays a heavy factor in her life. He has a skinny, pretty girlfriend and he personally looks like he could be on the cover of *Men's Health*. She does not look like her brother, or her

brother's girlfriend, so she does not fit in with the perceptions her family feels like she should look like.

Feeling good enough. Tessa knows she has a lot to offer, and when people are so stuck on her physical being and being overweight, it becomes frustrating. She really just wants to fit in, that is when she feels best about herself. But with society's mold, it is kind of hard to fit in and be noticed for her personality rather than her body weight.

Conclusion

The women's stories shared above gave the researcher insight to how these women have struggled with their body image related to peers, media, and within themselves. They indicate both similarities and differences.

CHAPTER V

Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This study was designed to further understand women and how those around them

along with the media influence their perception of their own body. The analysis of this

involves looking at what college women report as being the greatest influence on how

they perceive their bodies. This includes understanding what influence peer groups have

on their media consumption and how that then influences body image. This study also

analyzes what behaviors related to body image college women knowingly engage in to be

socially accepted by their peer group. This chapter will analyze the information provided

by each of the women to provide insight in to this topic.

RQ1: What do college women report as being the greatest influence on how they

perceive their bodies?

There are several factors that influence how individuals in this study perceive

their bodies. There are many people in a college woman's life, so it is not surprising that

this study found that various individuals influence these participant's image of self.

Other factors described below include: transition moments such as middle school, high

school, and college; media such as television and movies, and social media; and people

including family, peers, society, and the women themselves.

Transition moments. Perrig-Chiello and Perren (2005) defined transitions as

"points in the life course when roles are transformed, redefined, or left behind for new

ones" (p. 170). During a lifetime, one can go through transitions, some of which can be

challenging (Weiss & Freund, 2012). The women's challenges within their transitions to

middle school, high school, and then college were all very unique to each woman.

According to Weiss and Freund (2012), developmental transitions are aligned with the

unknown because they deal with new and unpredictable social underlinings that do not

follow any sort of rules. During a transition, a challenge that one can come across is the

unknown of a new situation that can bring about important decisions about what to do

(Weiss & Freund, 2012). That insecurity that happens during a developmental transition

in young adulthood could be particularly high for women because women have unclear

social expectations to live up to given the ever-changing world (Davis & Greenstein,

2009).

Middle school, for most young women, is the first step in a young women's life

when she comes together with other women in a much larger setting (Pickhardt, 2011).

Young women start to feel a sense of belonging amongst everyone, yet the young women

can also become more socially aggressive towards each other. Pickhardt went on to

explain that middle school is where women are picked on for appearing to be "different,

fat, and not pretty" (Pickhardt, 2001, p. 1) because of their age and maturity level.

When Khloe reached seventh grade, she began to become aware of how others

looked and how she looked compared to others:

> I mean you worry about what you are going to put on, how you are going to do
>
> your hair, what kind of make-up you are going to wear. I mean I did not start
>
> wearing make-up until seventh grade. But my mom caught me doing it, she
>
> caught me putting eyeliner on because I realized that was the "it" thing to do.

Molly first became aware of how she looked when she was in junior high and

became involved in cheerleading. Molly never really thought about make-up or clothes

up to that point, but began to realize that you start caring about what other people think of you. She started putting in effort and thought, "well someone has got to notice." Her mother bought her make-up to wear while cheering for games and she had "absolutely no clue what do with it." In the beginning she was only allowed to wear make-up for the games, but then rebelled and tried putting it on one day for school:

I go to school and everyone was looking at me like I had a second head, and I am like what is wrong? I look fine. And I did not. I had eyeliner all the way up to my eyebrows and it was ridiculous. And I think that was the first time that I understood the purpose of make-up and the point of changing your look for a purpose.

Annie first became aware of how she looked in eighth grade. She remembers that she wasn't big, but she didn't feel small, and she started comparing herself to the other girls. She compared features on her body to features on other girls' bodies and wished she looked like those other girls. As she moved into high school she started interacting more with the older girls and that is when she really started to care about her appearance.

High school. The transition from middle school to high school is like an adventure in to the land of the unknown and can be a difficult time for most people. Friendships and social interactions are vital for young adolescents going into high school, and sometimes this transition to high school can interrupt friendships (Barone et al., 1991).

In high school Annie would eat at McDonalds and her friends would make fun of what she ate, and joke that she was going to order the entire menu, making her feel very self-conscious. She remembers a specific time:

I got a new pair of jeans and they were looser, and I remember one of my flirty

guy friends coming up to me and he asked, "Are you losing weight because your

jeans are really loose...are you losing your butt?" And I said, "No, what the

heck?" And I was thinking, "Oh shit, I had to get like a bigger size because of my

butt." You know, people just notice that kind of stuff and it makes me wonder

why they notice. And why do they have the guts to come up to somebody and say

things like that? I would never have the guts to go up to someone and say rude

things like that.

She became very aware of the fact that people were looking at her body, and

actually asking her questions pertaining to the way she looked.

In high school, Tessa became a "socialized" person, which to her means that she

had to purchase a lot of clothing brands that she had never been exposed to before

moving to the suburbs. In Tessa's eyes she was becoming socialized to certain things and

to be a certain way. This carried on throughout high school as she would continue

buying the name brand clothes to fit in with her peers.

College. Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996), identified that support from college

students' peers was an important factor when making the transition from high school to

college. Pascarella (2005) found that during the first year of college, students

"Interactions with peers can have a significant influence on first-year intellectual growth"

(p. 132). Phinney and Haas (2003) stated that social support groups are important factors

to helping students handle their transition to college.

Molly talked about the challenges of coming to college:

I mean you are in a different community, you are in a different environment, you are checking everyone out. You are like, what do I need to wear or what do I need to look like so that I can fit in or so that I can be noticed?

Media. College women reported in this study that peers have the greatest influence on how they perceive their bodies. The women in this study reported that their friend groups had an influence on what they consume, but they did have more of an awareness of the media, just not positive or negative specifically.

Molly and her sorority sisters watch *The Vampire Diaries* and *Pretty Little Liars*. Mainly the conversations center on clothes, fashion, and men. Molly shares that in watching *Pretty Little Liars* the conversation is about many different things:

On *Pretty Little Liars*, Spencer is my absolute favorite character and I love her clothes. I adore her style and fashion and the way she dresses. She is one of those people that I think I identify with personally – like she is busy, she always tries to have her nose in absolutely everything. I think in all honesty we talk about the girls boyfriends. We focus on who they should be dating and why are they dating that particular girl, or who we would rather see them with. We can have some pretty serious conversations about those boys and the girls that they are dating. I am not really sure why, but it just worked and we love talking about those kind of things.

Another television show that Molly watches is *Sex and the City*. She recently started watching the first season, since she had not seen the first two seasons, and she "just loves it." She love's the fashion and the character Carrie's uniqueness. The sense of fashion she receives from these television shows, *Pretty Little Liars* and *Sex & the City*,

are portrayed through how she dresses. Molly has a very unique thrift-store style and really appreciates clothes for what you can accessorize with them, just like in these television shows that she has watched. She has an idolization for Audrey Hepburn, and her grandparents always told her, "You have to look like a lady." So she was raised like that, and she does not have a problem with the way she looks. The media influences Molly in the direction of her clothing style, not necessarily what she believes about body image internally.

Tessa talked about the way media sets up how women should look and the pressure she feels to look a certain way.

We are being socialized to be this way. But a lot about socialization happens when you do not realize it and you are being molded. Especially for a woman, it is like you are being forced into this school of thought and how to be because of the media. And so a lot of people do not pay attention to it, and think that the media does not influence girls, but it does. And so that is why people do not understand why girls have a lot of problems, or are very emotional.

Television and movies. What feeds Molly's perception of how she looks is the old media, such as the black and white Audrey and Katherine Hepburn movies. That is how she personally perceives beauty by looking at those types of women, instead of current women in the media. College women now are loud and boisterous, which she says there is nothing exactly wrong with that, she just prefers the classy kind of strength found in older times.

Social media. Khloe says that what feeds the perception of how she looks is "definitely the media." Recently she was looking at E! Online:

I was just looking at it and they have all of these pictures of these celebrities and how skinny they are. So of course you are comparing yourself to them and how beautiful they are because E! Online tells me so, so I need to look like that to be beautiful. Another example is with the television shows I do watch; all you see are the same kind of women. These women have long hair, brunette or blond, they are very skinny, they are usually tan—the more exotic looking the better. It is not realistic at all, and so that is just frustrating to see all of the time to have to live up to that.

Khloe states that she feels "self-conscious because I have short hair, and the media portrays the ideal image of a woman as having long hair." She identifies that the media is not realistic, which is frustrating to her as a woman.

People. This study found that college women are influenced by several different people including, family, peers, partners, and / or themselves.

Family. For young adults, the relationships they have with their families can provide an environment for them to express their thoughts and desires in a safe place and grow towards an integration of the self (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1988). In their families growing up they begin to learn how to care for themselves and how the world around them may be similar or different. Family played a role in how two participants, Tessa and Molly, perceive their bodies. One is positively influenced, while the other is negatively influenced. Molly shared, "My grandparents always told me, "You have to look like a lady", and so I was raised like that, which I do not have a problem with." Today Molly works hard to maintain that persona, dressing in vintage clothing and making sure she is put together before leaving the house.

Conversely, Tessa's family's comments related to her body image are more

connected to how they perceive her and her health:

My family tells me I "could be a lot prettier if…" and it is always about my

weight. My mom always asks me out loud in front of everyone why I don't have

a boyfriend. And I say the reasons why I do not think I have one, and then they

say their reasons, which are always because I am overweight.

Tessa's mother puts a lot of pressure on her to be a certain size. This pressure

also causes Tessa to evaluate her own health and body image:

My mother thinks that I have various health problems, but nothing too serious.

But she thinks all of them are attributed to me being overweight. She does not

understand that I still work out, and that I do not always eat healthy, but I do eat

healthy food sometimes. And so it is that guilt from my family that puts pressure

on my weight issues. Maybe if I just ate the healthier foods then I might by the

slimmer healthier type I guess.

Khloe and Annie's body image was neither positively nor negatively influenced

by their families.

Peers. A strong influencing association was found in late adolescent women on

their perceptions of their peers dieting and in their own drive for thinness (Graverner,

Haedt, Heatherton, & Keel, 2008). A study by Wasylkiw and Williamson (2012)

between young women and their peers perceptions of body image found that:

Body-related talk between friends that focused on exercise significantly predicted

less body dissatisfaction. Additionally, women's perceptions of their friends'

body image concerns aligned to both self-reports and to friends' actual reports

suggesting that women likely projected their own self-views when perceiving friends.

Both of these findings solidify research that peers do affect women and how they feel about their own body image. The women in this study were influenced by their peers' perceptions. Beginning in middle school through college these participants discussed various ways their peers influenced how they perceive their own bodies.

Annie's peers have influenced her since she was a young girl growing up in her hometown. She was very active in sports, always in the spotlight in her small town because of her athletic involvement. Now at college, Annie still feels pressure from her peers, but in a different sense. Annie sees other girls going out on the town in college, "these girls show their stomachs or have tight clothes on and I think to myself that I could never wear those clothes out because my stomach is not as flat as theirs." Or when she is at the gym she sees "skinny" girls working out spending a lot of the time at the gym like her, yet she sees a different set of results.

Tessa has come to realize that there are other things to worry about then how someone looks and thus tries to surround herself with individuals who are less concerned about the way she looks. Tessa states:

> I like to be challenged in thought and I like to think about things. I like friends
> who care about your hair and make-up and boys and things like that. But I also
> like friends who can challenge me in different aspects. And so those people tend
> to be my nerd friends, and so those are like my best friends.

Tessa and her friends have had many conversations about the DOVE® beauty campaign. Her roommate, who is smaller than Tessa does not agree with the DOVE®

beauty campaign because it is telling women that it is okay to be a larger size. Yet Tessa

does not think that at all. The conversations that arise are about what it means to be a

healthy weight, and what being healthy means to them personally. Tessa gets frustrated

during these conversations because she is a bigger girl, yet she feels healthy because she

works out and eats healthier than most people her size.

     Society. Cross-cultural studies on society in relation to the media identified that

images used in advertising create a new image of what being a woman should look like,

than women wish to look like that (Swinth, 2002). The Pygmalion effect is, "a situation

in which one person's behavior that reflects expectations about a second person leads the

second person to act in ways that confirm the first person's expectations" (Reynolds,

2002, p. 5). This effect impacts society and culture in large ways, in this case women's

identity (Lin & Yeh, 2009). Reynolds (2002), also found that how a woman behaves,

whether alone or within society, comes from society's expectations.

     While Khloe feels the pressure to have a significant other, she recognizes that she

is not going out to just find the perfect guy, but states that she is "trying to impress other

girls when I go out." The thought that other college girls are looking at her when she goes

out, and how they perceive her is on her mind. Khloe does think about whom she is

addressing before she goes out, "it is to impress other girls with your own fashion and

looks, but also to impress guys. First and foremost to attract men, then the women."

     Tessa states that women judge other women for how they are dressed or for what

they look like:

        There are a lot of people that think that a lot of clothes should be only worn on

        certain types of bodies, not just small, thin girls think that – but even some bigger

girls think that certain clothes should not be worn by a short girl or a tall girl. Women are always judging.

Self. The way people view themselves can influence how they take care of their own bodies and sense of self (Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2002). That can then lead to how they perceive their own body image. Khloe has been learning to take care of herself; last year she had so much going on both at home and at Montauk University that she gained 15 – 20 pounds. She stated that this was due to the stress around her that led to her feeling out of control and consuming more food than she normally would, which she considered unhealthy. Over this past summer she started running and training for a half marathon, and while training for the half marathon she started to feel much better about herself. Khloe began to understand that she needed to take care of herself:

I think that I have just accepted the fact that it should not be a normal thing for people to say, "You look pretty today", or "Oh, you look really great." Like you should feel good about yourself naturally. I used to depend on people to tell me those things to feel better about myself, but then I realized, "Why?" I can feel good about myself all on my own, and I started doing that.

Molly stated:

I am a strong woman, and I can notice other strong women and understand that strength does not necessarily come from your boob size. It is more of a class, and how classy you can be. What I mean by class is that women – from older black and white movies had more of a quiet strength. I just prefer the classy kind of strength of old films.

When Molly walks out of her house and gets that last look in the mirror it determines whether she will have a good or bad day:

> If you look great then you are going to have a great day and you feel great and you know everything is going to be good. But if you walk out the door and you look in the mirror and you look ridiculous, then you feel ridiculous and you feel like nothing you say matters and so it just sucks. But that is what it is.

Tessa talked about the pressure of society's image influencing how she sees herself:

> I know that everywhere around me there is this ideal to be thin. And so it is hard for me to separate myself, but if I did not have those pressures from the media would I still want to be thin? I don't know if it's something I am believing because the media tells me that, or if I want to be small for me, or if the media is putting those pressures on me. I think I want to be thinner, but really I just want to fit in thinner clothes, and I hate how the social world designs thinner clothes – you know, like obviously if I did not have the pressure of thinner clothes, I would not have the pressure to want to be thin.

Tessa understands two things about herself pertaining to her body image, "myself in society and what the media wants me to believe. And then there is another part about what people around me think about my body type." She classifies herself as being overweight, but she also sees herself as athletic since she is not a "couch potato that eats McDonalds all the time."

RQ2: What influence does peer group have on media consumption and how does that then influence body image?

Van Vonderen and Kinnally (2012) found that an important influence on a young women's attitude about her body image is her peers. When exploring peer influence on body dissatisfaction, social comparison theory has been appropriate (Van Vonderen & Kinnally, 2012). Their study also found that how a woman's peers felt about thinness was a main factor within her own internalization of the thin ideal.

Khloe watches minimal media, therefore media does not play a major role in her daily life. Khloe did find it hard to admit, but she bases her shows around attractive men. She watches shows with her peers when she finds time, like *Once Upon A Time, Chicago Fire,* and *Scandal* because of the "hot guys." She and her friends have conversations about the "hot guys" often while watching these shows. Also, she compares herself to the actress, Jessica Biel, because when portrayed in the media Jessica is very athletic and has muscles, just like Khloe.

Molly's peers heavily influence her television and movie selection. In her sorority house lately, they regularly have "Hot Man Movie Night." They have watched *Magic Mike, Chasing Liberty, 10 Things I Hate About You, The Vow,* and *The Notebook.* All of these movies have hot men in them, and she states that the conversations during the movies have nothing to do with the story line, mainly just the fashion and the men. While they don't always talk about how women look in these movies or how they compare to how the women look, it provides an outlet for interaction with her peers.

Annie is influenced by her peer group within the sorority; they all go to functions together, they go out to dinner and watch movies together:

We always watch *Gossip Girl*! We always end up talking about how catty the characters are or how there is always a conflict within it. We always talk about the fashion on the show as well.

While reading *Cosmopolitan* or *Seventeen* magazines, conversations occur regarding fashion. Annie and her friends talk about the clothes that they see in the magazines and the outfit ideas that they want to take and try to bring them to life within their own styles. With her peers Annie said they, "Mostly just talk about the girls' experiences and the stories that we read, the clothes, the food, the fashion, and working out."

When Tessa spends time with her friends watching movies, the conversations that happen are about the men and how the leading ladies are not pretty enough for the leading man:

We are judging if we think the girl is pretty enough or not pretty enough to be with that guy. For instance, we recently watched *The Vow* and *Dear John*, and in both of these movies we agreed that the girl was not pretty enough for him. Like he could get a prettier girl than Rachel McAdams or Amanda Seyfried casted. And we wonder why they do not cast prettier girls.

According to Tessa and her friends in today's society Megan Fox would be that perfect kind of pretty. But in the movie Dear John the main actress has the "homier look"—as in the guy would choose her to be his wife, not the fantasy girl. Tessa feels like models are more fantasy type, and homier girls are more realistic given the influence of media.

RQ3: How does the need to fit in influence how college women perceive themselves and the social interactions they have with others?

Social norming is a theory of human behavior where behavior is influenced by misguided perceptions of how peers in their social groups think and act in their lives (Berkowitz, 2004). Three of the four women in this study act within the social norms of their group of peers. That is they are acting in ways that they know are not always good, but doing so in an effort to fit in. Molly dresses how she wants, often being questioned by her peers about where she gets her clothes and why it takes her longer to get ready. To her it is the way she is and it does not bother her that her friends dress differently and doesn't change the way she dresses. The other women in the study are not like Molly though; they conform to their friend group norms to fit in. This happens through their interactions with their peers in a variety of ways including how they appear, what they wear, and what they consume.

When the women were in high school, there was a different need to fit in, and that shaped those social interactions. In high school, Khloe tanned and would get her hair and make-up done because she saw her peers doing this and saw it as a way to be the same as her peers. Whereas Tessa would change the way she looked to fit in, straightening her hair and wearing make-up. These women wanted to fit in while in high school, and in college the need to fit in changes slightly based on the social group they join.

While in college, all three women talked about their peer groups and the consumption of food. They all discussed how they would consume food that they knew was not good for them or in quantities that were not good, but as a group it was something they did. Khloe recently went to Buffalo Wild Wings:

Everyone was talking about what they were going to order and we were all

saying, "oh my gosh this is so bad for me, I should not be eating this much food."

But then we ate it anyways and went and got custard after, so really? But ya, stuff

like that, we eat it anyways. It is always those little comments like I should not be

eating this, but I am going to eat it anyways kind of thing.

Annie is aware that she eats poorly too when she is out with friends:

Sometime's it is like, "oh my gosh I shouldn't be eating this! This is so bad for

me!" But then it is like, "Oh well, it just happens, whatever, cannot change it

now." The conversations are meant to be funny with my friends, but really I see I

should not be eating this, or this is bad for you, or good thing I worked out today,

or good thing I did not work out today and waste a workout.

Tessa also shares how she is aware of eating what she knows is bad for her when

around her friends:

Most of my friends will eat bad food, such as macaroni and cheese, or at the

University Food Court we will eat the grilled hamburgers of grilled cheese instead

of Subway. It is always like, I know this is so bad for me, but I just had a bad day

so I want this greasy food, and I know I should have gotten Subway but I did not.

My friends and I talk about guilt, and that guilty conscious of eating poorly and

that guilt of eating bad food.

All of these women exhibit how eating badly when they are having social

interactions with their peer groups is part of their own social norming.

Two of the women discussed shopping with their friends, and how this influences

what they wear. While these shopping trips are vastly different, for both Annie and

Tessa, this is also a way that they see themselves either fitting in with their peers or not fitting in with their peers. Annie can fit into the clothes in the store, and she and her friends talk about how good or bad the clothes fit them, and then proceed to shop in the actual store. Annie looks to her peers for acceptance as she selects different items.

Tessa has a different experience while shopping because she cannot actually buy the clothes in the stores she goes to with her friends. Tessa will go on the shopping trips just so she can have those social interactions with her friends. She shops for accessories in the stores with her friends since that is all that will fit her, "I pick out stuff for my friends to buy, and I blame it on money as to why I am not buying actual clothes." Tessa wants to fit in and not be left out, which is why she ultimately goes on the shopping trips. When Tessa sees herself on Facebook with her friends she states that:

> Out of my friends, I am always the biggest and so it bothers me. I feel like I am ruining the pictures, or you can just really tell that I am the odd girl out. I cannot even shop for clothes since my size is not on the rack. I see it everywhere…that I am the odd ball out.

RQ4: What kinds of behaviors related to body image do college women knowingly engage in to be socially accepted by a peer group?

All four of the women in the study knowingly engaged in eating out at restaurants with their peers to be socially accepted. These women would eat poorly because everyone else around them was doing the same thing. Molly is the only one that went to the local Mexican restaurant to eat food and drink margaritas to discuss life's happening with her friends and she does not think about what she is eating. The other three would

knowingly eat poorly. Khloe knows she is eating poorly while she is out with friends and

realizes the effects it has on her:

> As a woman it is perceived that you should not be eating a lot of food, and then
>
> when you do you are kind of like "pigging out." It is inevitable someone's going
>
> to feel self-conscious about how much they do eat. And then if they do not eat
>
> enough they complain about how hungry they are, but they do not change
>
> anything.

Outside of food, Annie works out and looks at how to dress when reading

magazines such as Cosmopolitan and Seventeen with her friends. They talk about outfit

ideas and how women's bodies are supposed to be according to the magazine articles.

Tessa herself even says she "feels guilty" when she eats food that she knows is

bad for her into her body:

> I feel like I should not be limited to a certain standard, but I do feel food is meant
>
> to fuel your body, not for taste, so I feel guilty that I do not like the taste of things
>
> that I am actually supposed to be putting in my body, instead of just for pleasure.

Khloe puts on make-up before going out of the house to fit in with her peer group:

> I am not secure enough with myself to go out with no make-up on. And I mean I
>
> do not wear a ton, but I think what I do wear makes me feel secure enough to feel
>
> confident when I go outside of my house.

Annie will limit what she eats around her friends, knowing that if she eats more

she will have to go work out to lose the weight of what she consumed:

> I try not to eat big portions and I will not eat fast food all the time, even though I
>
> love it. When I am out with my friends I will eat a salad instead of a burger, and I

will not eat ice cream, cake, or sweets. In order to work off what I ate I will go to

the gym 3 – 4 times a week. If I worked out more, I could eat more fatty foods.

But I do not have the time to dedicate to it, so I have to watch what I eat.

In high school, both Khloe and Tessa would do the same things their peers were

doing to fit in. Khloe would tan for Prom to look "super-fly" and Tessa would straighten

her hair and wear make-up to fit into her new found peer groups she found after moving

to a new state. All of these women engaged in behaviors related to body image to be

socially accepted by their peer groups.

Conclusion

The women's stories provide insight into how women are influenced more by

their peers than the media. The media can affect women's clothing choices and how they

sometimes feel about themselves. Ultimately, their peers have a larger impact on them.

The women's peers affected how they ate, what they shopped for, if they even wanted to

go shopping, and how they felt about themselves.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusions

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how college women's body image was influenced by television, print media, and their peers. Utilizing qualitative research methodology, the researcher interviewed four undergraduate college women at a midsize public university in the Midwest. By analyzing interview transcripts for their own unique stories, the researcher was able to identify and categorize common themes that the four participants' voiced, which were described in chapters IV and V. Through listening to the women's individual 'voices', their stories about their own accounts growing up, and transitioning through life stages all the way to college, were not substantially different from other researchers findings on women in the literature review; however, the stories give insights to how the research findings look in everyday life on a college campus.

Previous literature found that women breakaway from their past experiences and start fresh when they enter a new part of their lives, in this case college (Belenky et al., 1986). This was found to be true as the women interviewed still kept their ties with friends from back home, yet wanted to make a fresh start for themselves by branching out into different social cliques. These women originally grew up in small towns so this new atmosphere in a college environment was different. The participants have had their college years to identify and further explore who they want to become (Arnett, 2000). Each of the women in the study have exhibited this by branching out and joining sororities, becoming involved on campus, and personally doing things that made them better individuals. Sides-Moore and Tochov (2011) identified that as women transition

throughout their lives, they seek relationships with other women of similar body shapes, sizes, concerns, and dieting behaviors, which is similar to Annie's story. She realized that her friend group is made up of women who look similar to her in body size and type. Levitt (2004) found that women have a fear of non-acceptance by both sexes within peer groups, and in the study Tessa and Molly were both examples of this in their way of viewing themselves and comparing themselves with others.

Sohn (2009) studied how the media influences women and their body image in identifying what is desirable versus undesirable. Tessa was influenced by what she saw in the media in relation to debates with her roommates, and what she believes society's "mold" is. Molly was slightly influenced by what she saw in the media in relation to her body, but mainly related to fashion. Molly watches television shows for their sense of fashion, and she had strong views on how women are portrayed in the media today; that is that they are being used to sell objects for their looks, not for anything else. Molly does not buy into other aspects of the current media, such as what she should wear – she actually prescribes to the media portrayal of women in the 1950's and 1960's thus having her own unique sense of fashion.

The idea that body shape comparisons lead to a greater level of body dissatisfaction identified by Jones (2001) was also evident in this study. All of the women compared themselves to other women around them, yet their own personal body dissatisfaction was not evident in all participants. Several times a day a comparison between women, both within their social groups and with whom they see in the media, is occurring (Lindner et al., 2008). Krcmar et al. (2008) examined how mass media causes internal discrepancies within the female mindset. The discrepancies that women can

encounter are interpersonal norms and media norms that cause lower self-esteem. The women in the present study were found to have similar findings to Krcmar et al. (2008) study. Tessa was influenced by her friend's reactions when going out, going shopping, or eating. Annie was influenced by needing that affirmation from her friends group before going out. These interpersonal norms were not found with the other two participants. However, Khloe does dress to impress both men and women before going out, but she is not influenced by her friend's actions, similar to Molly. Both of these women have a set of internalized values and beliefs that extend beyond their friends.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals

After reflecting on the findings of the present research and previous studies done on the topic, the following are recommendations to improve the overall approach that Student Affairs professionals could take when working with women on a college campus. The findings from this study could help to improve body image through approach and by creating a culture where women have a greater sense of self. Key contributors to improving body image among women are Student Affairs professionals because these individuals have the chance to live among women entering college. Not only could they possibly live amongst them, they can give the women confidence through use of theories and other research examined throughout their time in Higher Education. A culture can be created where women feel confident with who they are and with their own body image with the help of these Student Affairs professionals.

First Year Education. When college students enter college they are exposed to a new social atmosphere (Arnett, 2000). Part of that new atmosphere is women developing

new identities and finding out who they really are, forging a new beginning (Belenky, et al., 1986).

By developing educational seminars for freshman women, universities can grab their attention sooner before or as they are influenced within their new social groups and lifestyles. This seminar for first year women can help guide them while they are new and possibly help them from derailing later in college when being confronted with body image pressures. This freshman education seminar would be completely voluntary. If a seminar for the entire campus is not feasible, the same seminars could be put on within the women's floors of residence halls. Given a smaller audience, women may be more willing to attend to gain information. The seminar could be conducted in or by the women's center on campus so they automatically get that exposure of what this office does and how it can help women. The programs for this seminar would be speakers or workshops put together designed to inform those attending how to feel good about themselves. The seminar could be designed to help college students understand how peers can influence their body image, and how to develop and maintain and healthy lifestyle.

Wellness Course. By developing a wellness course in conjunction with a dietary management program, women could further develop their diet and wellness plan. This course could meet once a week as an elective or it could be run within an all-female residence hall. The class could be specifically designed to help improve women's awareness of self and health throughout the course. Some students come to college with little to no knowledge about how to maintain a healthy lifestyle, let alone what it means to have a good sense of self, so this class could be of benefit to that audience. Hawks et

al. (2008) published a study with the outcomes of a similar class at a Western university

that talked about dieting levels, eating styles, and body image among the college women.

The results showed that women taking the course improved their eating styles, healthy

habits, and it helped them avoid pressure outside of the classroom. This study shows that

an elective course could work, and Student Affairs professionals could teach this course

based on their training with women's development, counseling, and eating disorders.

Campus-wide programming. Improving the way women across campus feel

about themselves requires investment from a variety of offices and the staff in those

offices. Having professionals from various parts of campus identify ways they can

support women will help create a healthier culture for all students, and specifically the

women. Providing programming on body image, self-worth, eating habits and social

media awareness within Greek Life, Residence Life, Athletics, and other Student Affairs

areas with women in a concentrated area needs to be coordinated among professionals.

These programs should be designed to encourage women to work together to live

healthier lifestyles, identify and deal with eating disorders, and identify places on campus

they could go to talk with a professional.

One way that a campus might work to collaborate would be in developing a

campus wide programming initiative, such as a "Love Your Body" week. Any student

could take advantage of the "Love Your Body" Week, which would involve several

programs to encourage positive body image, self-worth, eating habits and social media

awareness. Professionals who work with health and wellness in the Student Recreation

Center, as well as counselors or faculty who deal with women's body issues, would be

encouraged to apply to teach special sessions throughout the week.

To start the week a kick-off event of a 5K could be put on in partnership with *Girls on the Run*, a National Organization that promotes forward movement in young school-aged girls. This 5K could combine a Feminist Action Alliance type of group on a campus to work with sororities, and other groups to promote healthy lifestyles to prepare and run the 5K. Having college-aged women love their bodies is a great inspiration for the young girls.

Other events throughout the week could be programmed with assistance from all women's organizations (such as sororities) to promote positive body image, and positive self-esteem. By involving groups with large numbers of women (Greek Life, Residence Life, Athletics, etc.) could promote the event to larger groups so more students would be more likely to attend the events for the week. Events occurring each day celebrating women, their unique body sizes, and who they really are would all be celebrated.

The Student Recreation Center on campus could provide fitness classes for the week specially designed for women. Events could include: Zumba with women's empowerment themed music, laps around the track for each part of your body you say you love, or any other creative incentives to encourage women to work out, and love their bodies. Within the Student Recreation Center, fitness and wellness tests could be conducted so students, faculty, and staff could determine their current state of wellness. The dining centers on campus could promote healthy eating this week by sponsoring nutrition education along with healthy menu options. To additionally encourage healthy eating professional dieticians could be on hand to help explain portion controls and creating a balanced meal to those participating.

The Programming Board could play movies throughout the week about women's body image or women coming together: *Real Women Have Curves, Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants, Divine Secrets of the YaYa Sisterhood, Killing Me Softly, Fat Camp*, etc. The movies could be followed by a discussion led by faculty or health and counseling professionals. The women's center or counseling center could put together a panel of speakers to answer questions students have about body image, staying healthy, and myths that the media portrays related to body size. The overall message of the week would be to love your body, no matter what shape or size.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The following are suggestions for further exploration of college women and the effects of the television, print media, and their peers on body image. While this study was small, conducting this study with a larger population would provide more insight in to the way women perceive their bodies and what factors have the greatest influence on this perception. The researcher gained a lot of valuable information from the women, but more stories to compare and contrast would have helped to gain further insight in to which factors have the greatest impact on how the women perceive their bodies. If a larger population of women were interviewed that could benefit the study by expanding ideas about how women think and what triggers them to give into social media pressures and the causes of body image issues.

A longitudinal study following women throughout their college career would provide a more comprehensive look at how women's personal view of their bodies and self-image change over the course of their college experience. The women in this study were nearing the end of their college career, and that provided information regarding how

far they have come and how their college experience affected their view of their body. By studying the women over several years, findings could evolve. This study was just a snapshot from one place in time from each woman. A longitudinal study would allow for the development of a relationship between the participant and the researcher, which would help gain further insight into women's personal views of their body and self-image.

In order to even further understand this topic, new outlets such as *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Pinterest* and *Instagram* need to be researched. These are all new to the media forefront and more information about these media outlets tied into the research could provide a greater understanding of how women's body image is impacted by these emerging media sources.

For a future study on the same topic, it would be interesting to interview specific groups of women from sororities, athletics, other ethnicities, etc. Based on the research, their findings could all be very different, and would provide greater insight to how media and peers influence self-perception. Each different group of women could provide more information for Student Affairs professionals, thus allowing for stronger programming efforts, which could be of great benefit for college campuses.

Conclusion

Much research has been reported on women and their body image, in particular college women and how they are affected by their peers, and media. This study sought to understand what influences college women in regards to their body image.

The women in this study faced similar problems that other women had encountered before them: peer influence, body image dissatisfaction, their own college

development path, and how they perceive their body image in comparison to other women. The women are conscious of what they eat, how they look compared to their peers, and how the media can influence them. The women were influenced by what their peers think of them more than the media's pressures.

As women go through college their perceptions of their body change, and this is influenced by their peers, the media, and the pressures they put on themselves. College women are bombarded with emotions when coming to college as a freshman, and throughout their college years and these emotions can be tough and challenging. The women in this study had an awareness of how the media could negatively affect their body image, but ultimately their peers influenced the women more than any other factor questioned in the study.

The women in this study all spoke about the influence of their peers in this study. Whether their roles were influencing what the women ate, where they ate, what they wore, or even what they watched; their peers in some way influenced all of the women. Knowing this information can help institutions identify signs of peer-norming and programming to help women. Also, knowing the importance placed on the relationships with their peers helps in determining how and where to reach these women.

Personally, as the researcher, I have a better sense of the pressure that come college women are facing today, especially related to how they perceive their body image. I came into this study not knowing how the results would affect me. I now have a better grasp on women's body image struggles, along with my own personal struggle that I dealt with as an undergraduate. I now realize that many women struggle with comments and remarks made by those around them, even at a young age, and those

words do not leave your brain. I relate to each woman in the study in a different way, but I identified with Tessa the most. Her struggles with being overweight resonated with me on a personal level. Since the study, I have continued to do my own self-reflection and I have taken away a sense of appreciation for my own body, and for that I am grateful.

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Appendix A

Call for Participants

Call for Participants

Hello:

My name is Sarah Knapp and I am a graduate student in the Department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University. Dr. Dianne Timm is my faculty supervisor and chair of my thesis committee. The purpose of this study seeks to identify how college women's image of self and their bodies are impacted by their peers, as well as by television and print media. I am interested in interviewing women who have lived in a residence hall, or all women housing (i.e. sorority house), and who are in their junior or senior year of college.

For the study, an outline of the expectations between researcher and participant will be sent to you. Once you have consented to participating, a day and time will be set-up in a private room of Career Services in the Human Services Center. Please know that all of the information you share throughout your interview time will be held in the strictest of confidence. You have the right to withdraw consent at any time without consequence, and all data will be destroyed.

Your participation in this study is more than appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me via email at sjknapp@eiu.edu or call me 217-371-1552 at any time. Please complete the attached Statement of Consent Form. Thank you in advance and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Sarah Knapp

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Statement of Informed Consent

This research project, *College Women and Body Image Perception: The Influence of Peers, Television, and Print Media,* is intended to explore the impact of peer pressures and the media related to how college women perceive their own bodies. It is important that as a participant you know that you are being asked to participate in a one-on-one interview in a private location, the Career Services offices in the Human Services Center. The private one-on-one interview is expected to last one hour in length. There are no physical risks involved; however the nature of this study may bring forward difficult topics that you have dealt with, or are currently dealing with, and the Counseling Center is free to all students of the University.

The benefits of this study are those more seen in Student Affairs and the programming aspects that could develop from the findings of this study. It is my personal hope that more programming geared towards women and their body image and the effects that those around them or the media may have, would be generated. Whether it be in Greek Life, Residence Hall floors, or just from a campuses Women's Center; any programs or assistance to women stemming from this study would be beneficial for women that have struggles with their body image.

The interviews will be audio recorded. Only the researcher and the interviewee will be present at the interview and the recording will be saved to a memory card on the researcher's computer. The interview will then be transcribed into an audio file. The computer of the researcher is under a password-protected lock, and only the researcher knows that password. Your name as a participant will be changed to protect your identity.

Transcriptions will be developed for each audio recorded interview and shared with other reviewers that the researcher has chosen, which include: the thesis chair, two peers in the graduate program; as well as yourself as the interviewee. The researcher's thesis chair, as well as two peers in her graduate program will look at the interviews to verify and double check the research. Hard copies of the transcripts will be given to the reviewers and returned directly to the researcher. This will ensure validity by having just the researchers eyes examine the transcripts to look at the college women's stories. All documents will be kept in a locked cabinet that only the researcher has access to, and will be retained for at least 3 years after completion of the research. Audio recordings will be erased after they are transcribed. In 3 years the research records, i.e. data, informed consent forms, will be shredded.

It is important that you be informed of your rights as a participant.

1. The identity of all participants will remain confidential and will not be released.

2. All data will be reported in the aggregate, without attribute to any single participant by name or other identifying information.

3. It is understood that your participation in this research project is voluntary and you will receive no compensation.

4. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have questions regarding your participation in this project, please contact me via email at sjknapp@eiu.edu or call me 217-371-1552 at any time. Questions regarding the administration of this project can be addressed to Dr. Dianne Timm at dtimm@eiu.edu. Any questions regarding counseling can be directed the Counseling Center in the Human Services Building. You may call Monday through Friday 8:30 am – 4:40 pm at 217-581-3413. In case of emergency please call 217-581-3413. For after-hours emergency contact our emergency number at 217-549-6483.

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write: Institutional Review Board, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920. Telephone: (217) 581-8576, E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu.

By affixing my name to this consent form, I agree to (initial all that apply):

_____(a) Participate in this study voluntarily;
_____(b) Allow quotations without attribution;
_____(c) Reserve the right to withdraw at any time;
_____(d) Give the researcher permission to audio and video record my interview;
_____(e) Decline to participate in the study.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date

Appendix C

Interview Guide Protocol

Interview Protocol

- Tell me about your life before coming to Charleston and EIU.

    o What was your relationship like with your parents?

    o What was your neighborhood/high school community like?

    o Tell me about your peer group growing up? (Diversity, neighbors, how

    long did you know them? What sorts of things did you do together? Etc.)

- Why did you choose to come to EIU?

    o Where do you live at EIU? Who do you live with?

        - How would you describe your relationship with your roommate(s)?

        - What sorts of things do you and your roommate(s) do together?

        (Watch TV/Movies, Read magazines/Books, Shop, hang-out, go

        out to eat, etc.)

- Tell me about your friend group(s) here at EIU?

    o Which group would you say you are closest to and why?

    o What sorts of things do you and your friends do together?

        - Television/Movies – what kinds of conversations do you have

        about what you watch? What is the focus of these conversations?

        - Magazines/Books – what kinds of conversations do you have about

        what you read? What is the focus of these conversations?

- ▪ Eat together – Tell me more about these experiences. Do you eat-out, eat in the cafeteria on campus, cook together, etc.? What sorts of things do you talk about while with the group and eating?

- ▪ Shop – Where do you mainly shop? What sorts of things are being discussed or shared in these settings?

  o Has your friend group changed since coming to EIU? Why or Why not?

- What is a typical day like for you?

  o Tell me more about that........?

  o What do you do with your friends?

  o How do you spend your alone time?

- How would you describe yourself? Why?

  o Tell me why you say that?

  o What does what you're saying mean to you?

  o How could you describe the way you look?

  o What feeds that perception of how you look?

- What makes you feel good about yourself?

  o When do you feel good about yourself?

- What makes you have a bad day?

  o How are you feeling when you have a bad day?