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Perceptions of body image: A study of college women in sororities and not in sororities

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This research is a product of the graduate program in [Counseling and Student Development](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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Perceptions of Body Image: A Study of College

Women in Sororities and Not in Sororities

(TITLE)

BY

Amy L. Piekarski

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2011

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PERCEPTIONS OF BODY IMAGE:
A STUDY OF COLLEGE WOMEN IN SORORITIES AND NOT IN SORORITIES

Amy L. Piekarski

Thesis

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Eastern Illinois University
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May 2011

ABSTRACT

College students, especially women, experience several extreme changes during their undergraduate years. These changes occur in areas of physical development, mental capacity, personality expression, and interpersonal relationship development. With these women leaving home and trying to find their place and fit in at their new institution, they seek out various groups of people and organizations to join. One group or organization that many college women engage in is sorority membership. To date, minimal research has been conducted to investigate whether membership in a sorority has a negative or positive effect on their self images. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the self perceptions of body image between sorority members and non-sorority members at a small Midwestern university. Through quantitative survey, this study sought to explore the differences between current sorority members and non-sorority members and how they felt about their general body image and individual parts of the face and body. Findings from the present study were not statistically significant, however there were noteworthy findings. For example, while current membership in a sorority did not seem to have an effect on their self perceptions of body images in general, all women felt overwhelming negative about the shape of their abdomen. The survey questions were grouped into nine subcategories and both sorority and non-sorority members felt more positively about both their overall facial appearance as well as their individual facial features.

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DEDICATION

Music is extremely important to me and has brought me through many tough situations in my life. Therefore, in the words of Christina Aguilera and her song "Beautiful":

'Cause you are beautiful no matter what they say

Words can't bring you down,

You are beautiful in every single way.

Yes, words can't bring you down,

So don't you bring me down today.

This is for all the young girls and women that do not feel confident about their physical appearance. They suffer daily internally to try and accept themselves despite the constant ridicule that they may experience from others. Remember there are people in the world that love you and think you are beautiful just the way you are.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

College students, especially women, experience several extreme changes during their undergraduate years. These changes occur in areas of physical development, mental capacity, personality expression, and interpersonal relationship development. While additional skill sets and experiences are abundant, undergraduate women must also contend, more so than men, with what society dictates as physical beautiful. Having left home and required to fend and think for themselves, many co-eds find themselves in emotional places in which they do not know or feel comfortable. “Social connectedness and belonging appear to be particularly important in college. The sorority, club, or residence hall may be the primary social, academic, and support network for a student. Approval and acceptance from such groups are critical components of students' existence” (Levitt, 2004, p. 111). With this desire for approval and wanting to be accepted, undergraduate co-eds set out to 'find themselves' and desperately seek to 'fit in'. “Thinness and attractiveness are highly valued in the college culture,” therefore fitting in and being accepted in today's society is associated with not only physical appearance but clothing, and the display of positive sense of self (Levitt, 2004, p. 110). These and other expectations put extra pressure on young women. Many co-eds come to college with body image issues, which Miles defined as “how the individual perceives her body and attitudes regarding the size and shape of her body”, along with self-esteem issues (Miles, 2009, p. 4). When presented with the pressure to fit in, their thought and actions often turn irrational (Miles, 2009).

With college women feeling the pressure to fit in, being out of their comfort zone and experiencing the media's portrayal of the ideal body shape for women, accepting one's self for who they are seems to be a difficult task. Self-acceptance is defined as “affirmation or

acceptance of self in spite of weakness or deficiencies” (Shepard, 1979, p. 141). In today’s society, women are told the things they do not like about themselves, their deficiencies, do not have to be accepted and can be changed. Most of these changes can occur simply by applying makeup, wearing certain types of clothing or undertaking more measures such as resorting to cosmetic surgery. There are also added factors related to sorority membership which many young women consider extremely important.

“Social fraternities and sororities have a long history in American higher education and were formed as a means to create community and a sense of affiliation while promoting leadership, service, and scholarship” (Dugan, 2008, p. 16). However, historically, college sororities are also known to have a very selective process which includes the ideal of being physically attractive, which for women, society correlates with having a slender body figure. Despite recruitment experiences and ultimate acceptance into what would seem to be an elite group, college women continue to seek acceptance by members of their sorority and quite possibly the general college community as well. If one is rejected from an organization or the entire sorority system, young women might consider themselves to not be as physically attractive as the other women who were accepted. Therefore, physical attractiveness is one of the major issues with which young college women struggle in terms of their body image.

The present study is an investigation of the potential differences among young women who are members of a sorority and those who are not, regarding their feelings about their body images.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the present study are as follows:

- (1) To what extent is body image involved in the sense of self-acceptance among college women?
- (2) To what extent is self acceptance of one's body image influenced by sorority membership?
- (3) Is there a significant difference between undergraduate status and how women feel about their body image?
- (4) With which of their physical characteristics are sorority women most pleased?
- (5) With which of their physical characteristics are non-sorority women most pleased?

Significance of Study

The significance of the present study is that it may be the first examination of college sorority and non-sorority women enrolled at Eastern Illinois University (EIU) and their sense of body images. More specifically, the present study may result in the discovery of a correlation between the ideal body image perceptions of women in sororities versus women who are not in sororities while attending this midsize public university.

Definitions of Terms

Self-acceptance: "affirmation or acceptance of self in spite of weaknesses or deficiencies" (Shepard, 1979, p. 141).

Sorority membership: to be a part of an organization that creates "community and a sense of affiliation while promoting leadership, service, and scholarship" (Dugan, 2008, p. 16).

Overview of Study

Chapter I of the present study contains the Introduction, a statement of the research problem, significance of the study, a definition of relevant terms and the principle limitations to the study. Chapter II is comprised of an extensive review of current literature on perceptions of body image of college and sorority women. Chapter III is devoted to an extended presentation of the methodology utilized for the present study, including an explanation of its strengths in survey research and its basic tenets which guided the study; a description of the site where the study has been performed; a description of the population under study; and a description and analysis of the collected data. Chapter IV contains the findings for the present study representing the feelings and self perceptions of the women involved. Chapter V contains an analysis of the research findings, a discussion of prior research in comparison to the findings in the present study, conclusions drawn, and a list of recommendations for future research in this area along with potential recommendations for student affairs practitioners charged with the responsibility for providing support for women conflicted with their body image.

Limitations of Study

The principle limitation to the present study may be prior relationships between the primary researcher, a residence hall administrator, and the participants. The participants were students over whom the primary researcher had disciplinary oversight and social and developmental programming responsibilities. Therefore, the possibility of participants not wanting to participate due to a previous encounter with the primary researcher could be likely.

Another limitation to the present study is that the majority of the participants were first year students. The building surveyed was one of the primary housing options for freshman

students and had a low retention rate for students after their first year; therefore, the number of potential sophomore, junior and senior participants was limited.

A final limitation was the population of women who were participants in an NPHC (National Pan-Hellenic Council) organization. NPHC organizations are not allowed to take in first year students, so this population of students is limited to women with sophomore or higher class standing.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The following articles and studies have as their focus young women in college and their body images. The authors and researchers all explored, in some way, the effects of body image on both college women that are sorority members and those who are not and what factors dictated how they felt about their body image and self-esteem.

In 1994 Atlas and Morier conducted a study of 105 first-year college women recruited to participate in a three part study of “college life” at a liberal arts college in the Eastern United States. The participants’ responses were examined as a function of whether they “rushed” a sorority or not. The researchers found that women who rushed a sorority were likely to be more physically attractive, have higher family incomes and used alcohol more frequently. The women who did not rush or were rejected by a sorority were found to have more depressive tendencies than did women who did rush a sorority. When asked to identify why they felt they were rejected, both groups of women identified factors that would lead to the most positive view of themselves.

Basow, Foran, and Bookwala (2007) described how 265 women at a small liberal arts college on the East Coast rushed sororities. They concluded that women who were rejected were more likely to engage in eating disorders than were women who were not planning on joining a sorority. In addition, Basow, Foran and Bookwala used as their working hypothesis that women who were a part of a sorority, the women that were planning on joining, as well as the women that lived the longest in a sorority house scored higher on the measures of disordered eating, body objectification and social pressures than did non-sorority women or women that had no intention of rushing. The researchers concluded that sororities attract women who are likely to

engage in negative thinking about their body and the amount of time they spend living in a sorority house was directly related to their likelihood of developing an eating disorder.

Cohn and Adler (1992) conducted a study in a Midwestern private college where men and women answered survey questions about their current body figure, their ideal body figure, the figure that is most attractive to same-sex peers as well as opposite sex-peers. The findings of this study were very interesting, but expected. The women's ideal of themselves, those of their peers, as well as their attractiveness to the opposite sex was always a body size smaller than that of their own. The women's perceptions on what males thought was attractive were significantly different than what males actually answered. Males described a larger ideal body image for women than what women thought that men would.

Harris (1995) conducted a study that examined factors that influenced body-image attitudes of 90 African-American college women at three large, predominately Euro-American universities in the southeastern United States. Specifically, Harris analyzed the relationship between specific levels of categorical variables (e.g., family income, and parents' educational level) and the three main measures of body image. While many of the hypotheses were not supported by the research findings, Harris did find that the women's satisfaction with body images was associated with family and self-acceptance factors.

In an exploratory study conducted at a western university, researchers Hawks, Madanat, Smith and De La Cruz (2008) evaluated the impact of a theory-driven college course on dieting levels, eating styles, and body image among college women. The target population for the study was college woman who desired an overall better body image and wanted to live a healthier lifestyle. The participants were given a pretest survey as well as a posttest survey. Comparison of the pre- and posttest results indicated that the women who participated in the study left the

class with an improved sense of understanding when it came to dieting levels, eating styles and body image.

Hodge, Jackson and Sullivan (1993) examined the hypothesis that the “Freshman 15” may be more of a fantasy than fact. Women in their study were weighted during their first month of college and again six months later. The sample was quite small; however, most women remained the same weight as when they were first weighted and there was no significant correlation found between body image, self-esteem and focus of control to the weight change among women who gained weight, which was on average seven pounds.

In 2001, researchers Hoyt and Kogan surveyed 101 males and 187 females asking them about their body image and satisfaction with their relationships between both peers and significant others. Their hypotheses were (1) men would be more dissatisfied with their upper bodies, whereas women would be more dissatisfied with their middle/lower bodies; (2) overweight individuals would be the most dissatisfied with their bodily appearance and with their relationships with peers; (3) a positive correlation exists between satisfaction with appearance and satisfaction with relationships, specifically with paired men and women. When reviewing the results, it was found that women were more dissatisfied than were men with their overall body characteristics, specifically their abdomen, waist, buttocks and thighs, as well as their weight. However, men were more dissatisfied with their relationships and sex lives than were women. While the researchers found that women were troubled by their appearance more than men are, they also concluded that women, to some extent, felt satisfied with their overall appearance.

Landa and Bybee (2007) conducted a study that explored the differences in personality variables in women who were in a sorority at the time of the study and alumni of that same

sorority (i.e., women who graduated a dozen or more years before). Their research determined that women in the sorority at that time were more likely to develop an eating disorder and engage in negative body image thoughts than women who were alumni. Thoughts of perfection and self-image were much less prevalent in alumni than in women who were currently members of the sorority. Landa and Bybee concluded that maturity of the women was a key factor to negative feelings about their body image.

Levitt (2004) discussed the drive for thinness and the fear of fat among college women and discussed how the drive for thinness and the fear of fat are the reasons why there were such a large number of college age women that had or engaged in some form of eating disorder. Levitt defined the drive for thinness and the fear of fat and how and why they have such an impact on college age women; concluding that women in sororities are more likely to have greater body concerns than women who are not in sororities. More specifically, Levitt found that women in sororities have more fear of fat and concluded that the thinness ideal is typically standard for sororities. The fear of non-acceptance by both female peers and members of the opposite sex is one of the major driving factors for developing an eating disorder among college women. Finally, Levitt identified various treatments and prevention techniques that could help women who engage in eating disorders in the collegiate environment.

Lowery (2005) and others conducted research on 267 female and 156 male first-year college students with a focus on relationships between self-esteem, body image, exercise and other health-related behaviors. They adopted; (1) male college students would have a more positive body image than would female college students; (2) self-esteem would be negatively related to body image dissatisfaction for both women and men; (3) men who regularly exercised would have higher self-esteem and a more positive body image than would women who

regularly exercised, but that there would be no differences between women who exercised and women who did not; (4) students with more positive health-related behaviors would have higher self-esteem and a more positive body image. All four hypotheses were supported through their research and subsequent findings. As predicted, men had more positive body images than did women. Lowery also found that acceptable body size may be influenced by societal definitions of appropriate and attractive shapes for both men and women.

In a more recent study, Krcmar, Giles and Helme (2008) examined the effects of norms, both interpersonal and mediated, on young women's sense of body esteem for 427 incoming freshmen women attending a private university in the southeastern U.S. The researchers took into account the role of interpersonal norms and social comparisons as a mediator for the relationship between media norms and lowered self esteem. Overall, parents, peers, and the mass media were found to often be linked in a complex web of effects, with parents and peers focusing on interpreting and reinforcing various media images for young women.

Miles (2009) discussed how the body image that college age woman have of themselves can affect their academic success by way of a survey administered to 618 undergraduate women at three Midwestern universities. The findings suggested that the better a woman's attitude was toward her body image, the higher her GPA. The same was seen for the women that felt negatively about their body images as they tended to have lower GPAs. These findings supported Miles's hypothesis that body image for undergraduate women has an effect on their academic success.

In 2002 Thomsen examined how women's magazines, particularly two categories of magazines (i.e., health and fitness, and beauty and fashion) dictate ideal thin images for women that are harmful and cause women to engage in unhealthy thoughts about their bodies. Data

collection for the study involved a survey administered to 340 college-aged women about factors that predicted their concerns about their bodies. The results of the survey indicated three things: (1) the strongest predictor of body image issues were men's perceptions and expectations of women's thinness, (2) two categories of health and fitness magazines were directly related to body image concerns, and (3) hope was not influenced by reading either type of magazine.

Summary

Each of the studies presented above highlight several issues that young college women go through with their body image and self-esteem. Several of the studies touch on the major issues of eating disorders and how the number of cases of eating disorders or other psychological disorders that deal with weight are on the rise. The images that are portrayed for women on television, in beauty and fashion magazines and within their own peer groups make it difficult for college women to feel acceptance for the body they have. It seems that the ideal of being thin is ingrained in their heads and even if they do lose weight or exercise on a regular basis, they still do not seem to be satisfied with their bodies.

It is, however, not very clear through the research above if young women in sororities have more of a negative or positive outlook on their body image than women who are not in a sorority. The acceptance into a group such as a sorority can result in a lot of pressure on a young college woman when it comes to her body image. But, once accepted into a sorority or rejected by one, what peers think of one's body can also result in a significant amount of stress on young college women.

While there might not be a focus on racial diversity in the studies conducted thus far, there remain significant amounts of information that can be used to help navigate the issues with body image among all college women.

CHAPTER III

Methodology**Survey Research**

The research was created and conducted through an on-line survey system called SurveyCentral that is managed by a technology office on the institution's campus. During the semester in which the survey was made available, there were 307 women living in the residential living and learning facility. All 307 received an invitation to participate in the survey over a three week time period. Of the 307 women, responses were received from 68 for a response rate of 22.1 percent.

The primary researcher chose to conduct a on-line survey in order to obtain the desired findings. "Surveys are most useful when you have a targeted, identifiable audience whose attitudes can be measured." (Belden, Russonello, & Stewart, 2004). A survey was able to help obtain statistical data for analysis as well as attain instinctual responses from participants from one specific residential living and learning facility of 307 women. The survey questions will address the participants' feelings towards their body image; therefore, "A survey is the right choice when you need to know more about an audience's awareness and feelings" (Belden, Russonello, & Stewart, 2004). Questions dealing with body image can be extremely personal and potentially invasive; therefore, having participants respond on their own time and in a personal space may have facilitated more comfortable and truthful answers. Having the survey be distributed through the potential participants' institution email address was meant for the possibility of a quick response rate as well as no cost to the primary researcher.

Design

The survey instrument utilized in the present study was a modified version of the *Body image: How you see it, and how you don't* survey developed by Dusty A. Jestes, Department of Psychology at Missouri Western State University. Jestes' original survey contained 42 items, including demographic information (e.g., gender) and distributed to 50 men and 50 women living in a coed residence hall. To develop his survey instrument, Jestes himself modified two different surveys. The first was a general survey adopted from an undergraduate researcher and the other survey was adopted from Berscheid et al (1987) and first appeared in *Psychology Today*, 55, 889-87. For purposes of the present study, Jestes' survey instrument was further modified to fit the host site. Specifically, modifications to the Jestes survey instrument included the following: (1) additional demographic queries (e.g., undergraduate class standing, membership status in a sorority, participation in sorority recruitment, planning on joining a sorority as an undergraduate); (2) an additional question regarding ankles; (3) deletion of queries related to sexual organs, mouth, and voice; and (4) several terms were altered to reflect current day student styles of communication and to avoid duplication of questions. The design of the adapted questionnaire contained a total of 48 items. Completion of the survey instrument was estimated to take approximately 15 minutes.

Setting

The research was conducted on-site at a mid-sized public university located in the Midwest and founded in 1895. The institution is home to nearly 12,000 students, but has kept its small-campus atmosphere. The student population is comprised of roughly 57% female and 43 percent males; representing 38 different states and 40 countries. Although Caucasians are the vast majority (76.4%) of the student population, racial groups across campus are represented as

follows: Black, non-Hispanic (11.9%), Hispanic (2.9%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.2%), Native American (0.5%) and International / other (7%). The institution is located in a rural, farming community with approximately 30,000 permanent residents, including students at the university. The online survey was distributed to students living in only one of the 15 residential living and learning facilities on campus.

Site

The residential living and learning center in which the participants in the present study reside is comprised of two towers, one comprised of all females and one comprised of all males, with a total maximum population of 650 students. The majority (99%) of the students living in the building are first year undergraduate students.

Participants

The women who were solicited for participation in the current study were undergraduate women residing in a predominately first year student residential living and learning center that accommodates 307 students, of whom, approximately 90 percent were Caucasian. Additionally, participants were between the ages of 18 and 22 and ranged in academic standing from freshmen to senior status. The survey was not limited to only Caucasian students, as every student who resided in the building was offered an opportunity to participate.

Data Collection

Data collection for the present study took place in the form of an online survey instrument. Initially, the women were informed of the survey through their regularly scheduled floor meetings facilitated by their Resident Assistant. Following the meeting, prospective participants received an email informing them again about the survey, in case they were not present at the meeting, and how to participate in the survey. About five days after the initial

survey email was sent out the primary researcher created a reminder that was hung on all potential participants' door knobs. The door reminder stated the opportunity for participants to participate in the survey and the link to the survey was also provided. As incentive to participate in the survey, the participants were given an opportunity to submit their email address for entry in a random drawing for a \$50.00 gift certificate to Walmart if they completed the survey.

Data Analysis

Findings from the current study reflect tabulations of survey responses based on the application of a numerical scale to facilitate statistical tabulation of responses to self-perceptions of how one's body looks (i.e., never = 1; rarely = 2; sometimes = 3; often = 4; very often = 5; and always = 6). However, some of the survey questions required a reverse order for scoring (i.e., never = 6; rarely = 5; sometimes = 4; often = 3; very often = 2; and always = 1). An alternate rating scale was used for items requesting information on specific facial features and body parts (e.g., extremely satisfied = 6; satisfied = 5; somewhat satisfied = 4; somewhat dissatisfied = 3; dissatisfied = 2; and extremely dissatisfied = 1). There was no reverse ordering for any of the questions regarding specific facial features and body parts. Findings are presented in tables. There was a total score tabulated to determine the participants' body image scores. The higher the score, the better body image the participants seemed to have about themselves. The means were also be tabulated in order to determine the average answer for each subgroup of non-sorority women and current sorority members. Narrative descriptions of findings follow each table.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This chapter is a presentation of the findings from the survey containing participants' responses. A total of 68 participants responded to the survey. To 48 survey items, the participants responded regarding their general view of their body image and how they felt about specific parts of their face and body. While there were no statistically significant findings from the survey results, there were a number of meaningful findings. The following tables represent grouped responses to one or more survey items.

Table 1 – Undergraduate Status

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Freshman	61	89.7
Sophomore	3	4.4
Junior	1	1.5
Senior	3	4.4
Other	0	0.0
Total	68	100.0

The majority of the participants (N = 68) were freshmen women (89.7%, n = 61) which was expected due to the makeup of the residence hall. The residence hall in which the survey was administered predominantly houses first year students. The demographic profile of the building included a total of 307 women. Of this number, 293 were registered as freshmen; 12 registered as sophomores, 2 registered as juniors and although two participants indicated seniors class standing, this credit hour status was not confirmed in university records for any student living in the residential living center at the time data were collected for the present study.

Tables 2 – Ethnic Backgrounds

Table 2.1 – African American

	n	%
No	55	80.9
Yes	13	19.1
Total	68	100.0

Table 2.2 – Asian American

	n	%
No	68	100.0

Table 2.3 – Caucasian American

	n	%
No	15	22.1
Yes	53	77.9
Total	68	100.0

Table 2.4 – Hispanic American

	n	%
No	64	94.1
Yes	4	5.9
Total	68	100.0

Table 2.5 – Native American

	n	%
No	68	100.0

Table 2.6 – Non-American Citizen

	n	%
No	68	100.0

Table 2.7 – Other

	n	%
No	68	100.0

Tables 2.1 - 2.7 represent the ethnic background of survey participants. Ethnic backgrounds of the participants by percentage were as follows: Caucasian American (77.9%), African American (19.1%) and Hispanic American (5.9%). The majority of the participants identified as Caucasian American as expected. However, all participants had the option of selecting more than one ethnic background. Only two participants exercised this option.

Table 3 – Current Sorority Status

	n	%
Yes	16	23.5
No	52	76.5
Total	68	100.0

Table 4 – Ever a Member of a Sorority

	n	%
Yes	14	21.2
No	52	78.8
Total	66	100.0

Table 5 – Recruitment Participation

	n	%
Yes	24	35.8
No	43	64.2
Total	67	100.0

Table 6 – Plan to Join

	N	%
Yes	32	48.5
No	34	51.5
Total	66	100.0

The above Tables 3 thru 6 illustrate current and potential sorority membership. Of the survey participants, 16 were currently members of a sorority; 14 were former members; 24 had participated in recruitment activities; and 32 planned to join at some point in the future.

Table 7 – General Body Image

	Frequency (n)	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Variance (V)
Survey Q8: Shape of body	68	3.28	1.183	1.398
Survey Q9: Confident in body	67	3.27	1.399	1.957
Survey Q10: Satisfied with weight	68	2.85	1.427	2.038
Survey Q11: Control weight	68	3.81	1.417	2.008
Survey Q12: Change Shape	68	2.90	1.405	1.974
Survey Q13: Disadvantage socially	68	4.10	1.508	2.273
Survey Q14: Disadvantage athletically	67	4.12	1.441	2.076
Survey Q15: Disadvantage sexually	68	4.46	1.501	2.252
Survey Q16: Exercise frequently	67	3.58	1.327	1.762
Survey Q17: Discontent body build	68	3.87	1.392	1.937
Survey Q18: Muscle tone	67	3.66	1.452	2.108
Survey Q19: Strong	67	2.78	1.112	1.237
Survey Q20: Physically fit	64	2.72	1.386	1.920
Survey Q21: Compared body	66	2.89	1.590	2.527
Survey Q22: Avoid situations	68	4.09	1.484	2.201
Survey Q23: Self conscious	66	3.70	1.539	2.368
Survey Q24: Self describe	68	3.51	0.906	0.821

Table 7 represents participants' answers to survey questions 8 through 24 which asked about general feeling toward their body image. Questions 11 through 18 and 21 through 23 were scored in reverse order. The participant's average scores were calculated and the higher the score the better the participants felt about their general body image. Question 20, relating to how physically fit the participants feel they are, had the lowest mean at 2.72 (n = 64). Question 15, asked if the participants feel their body is a disadvantage to them sexually, had the highest mean at 4.46 (n = 68).

Table 8 – Individual Facial Features and Body Parts

	n	M	SD	V
Survey Q25: Height	68	4.69	1.040	1.082
Survey Q26: Weight	68	2.79	1.311	1.718
Survey Q27: Hair	68	4.60	1.447	2.094
Survey Q28: Eyes	66	5.11	0.862	0.742
Survey Q29: Ears	68	5.13	0.913	0.833
Survey Q30: Nose	68	4.72	1.208	1.458
Survey Q31: Lips	67	4.94	0.903	0.815
Survey Q32: Teeth	67	4.39	1.370	1.877
Survey Q33: Chin	68	4.81	1.040	1.082
Survey Q34: Neck	67	4.75	1.133	1.283
Survey Q35: Complexion	68	4.24	1.415	2.004
Survey Q36: Overall facial appearance	68	4.41	1.040	1.082
Survey Q37: Shoulders	67	4.61	1.114	1.241
Survey Q38: Breasts	67	4.21	1.377	1.895
Survey Q39: Arms	67	3.75	1.396	1.950
Survey Q40: Hands	66	4.53	1.193	1.422
Survey Q41: Abdomen	67	2.67	1.440	2.072
Survey Q42: Buttocks	67	3.79	1.610	2.509
Survey Q43: Hips	67	3.72	1.584	2.509
Survey Q44: Legs	67	3.63	1.594	2.540
Survey Q45: Ankles	67	4.57	1.351	1.825
Survey Q46: General muscle tone	66	3.67	1.232	1.518
Survey Q47: Overall body appearance	67	3.63	1.391	1.934
Survey Q 48: Self-rank	68	5.82	1.820	3.312

The above table is a representation of the average responses to survey questions 25 to 48.

These survey questions focused on individual facial features and body parts. There were no reverse scoring for these survey items. Again, the participants' average scores were compiled and the higher the score the better the participants felt about that specific feature. Question 29, relating to the participants ears, had the highest mean at 5.13 (n = 68). Question 41 had the lowest mean, which asked participants about how they felt about the size of their abdomen (“stomach”/“belly”), at 2.67 (n = 67).

Table 9 – Self-Rank by Current Sorority Status

	n	M	SD
Yes	16	5.53	1.784
No	52	5.88	1.843

Table 9 represents participants’ responses to survey question 48. The question asked the participants to rank their body on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest (not satisfied at all with how their body looked) and 10 being the highest (very satisfied with how their body looked). Participants not in sororities ranked themselves higher did than women who were currently in a sorority with an average of 5.88 (n = 52). Participants that who stated that they were currently in a sorority ranked themselves with a 5.53 average (n = 16); thus indicating they felt slightly less positive about their overall physical appearances.

Table 10 – Subcategories Averages

Subgroups	N	M	SD	V
Survey Q8-9: General body	68	3.2721	1.22607	1.503
Survey Q10-12: Weight	68	3.1863	1.12470	1.265
Survey Q13-15: Disadvantages	68	4.2279	1.18968	1.415
Survey Q16-20: Exercise	68	3.3199	0.78565	0.617
Survey Q21-23: Comparing	68	3.5809	1.34000	1.796
Survey Q27-35: Individual facial features	68	4.7433	0.63436	0.402
Survey Q36: Overall facial appearance	68	4.4100	1.04000	1.082
Survey Q37-46: Individual body parts	68	3.9190	0.94141	0.886
Survey Q47: Overall body appearance	67	3.6300	1.39100	1.934

Table 10 illustrates the nine subcategories that were created and the averages of all participants’ answers. The subcategory that has a smallest mean indicates that the participants felt the least positive about those grouping of questions and the larger mean the more positive participants felt about those grouping of questions. The lowest mean of the subcategories were questions 10 to 12, regarding participants weight and wanting to control their weight, at 3.1863

(n = 68). Questions 27 to 35, regarding participants individual facial features, had the highest mean at 4.7433 (n = 68).

Table 11 – Subcategories by Sorority Status

	Current Sorority Status	n	M	SD
Survey Q8-9: General body	Yes	16	3.4063	1.52991
	No	52	3.2308	1.13094
Survey Q10-12: Weight	Yes	16	3.0208	1.15129
	No	52	3.2372	1.12282
Survey Q13-15: Disadvantages	Yes	16	3.9271	1.18785
	No	52	4.3205	1.18627
Survey Q16-20: Exercise	Yes	16	3.4375	0.71262
	No	52	3.2837	0.80985
Survey Q21-23: Comparing	Yes	16	3.2708	1.34009
	No	52	3.6763	1.33839
Survey Q27-35: Individual facial features	Yes	16	4.6189	0.76285
	No	52	4.7815	0.59258
Survey Q36: Overall facial appearance	Yes	16	4.6300	1.02500
	No	52	4.3500	1.04600
Survey Q37-46: Individual body parts	Yes	16	3.6118	0.98425
	No	52	4.0135	0.91688
Survey Q47: Overall body appearance	Yes	16	3.5000	1.46100
	No	51	3.6700	1.38100

The above table represents the subgroups (current sorority members and non-sorority members) average scores for each of the nine subcategories. The nine subcategories were created in order to tabulate the areas in which the subgroups felt they were the most satisfied and least satisfied with when it came to their body image.

Table 12 – Current Sorority Member Subcategories Means

Subcategories	n	M	SD
Overall facial appearance	16	4.6300	1.02500
Individual facial features	16	4.6189	0.76285
Disadvantages	16	3.9271	1.18785
Individual body parts	16	3.6118	0.98425
Overall body appearance	16	3.5000	1.46100
Exercise	16	3.4375	0.71262
General body	16	3.4063	1.52991
Comparing	16	3.2708	1.34009
Weight	16	3.0208	1.15129

Items in Table 12 represent the rank ordering of current sorority members regarding their overall concerns with their physical appearances. For example, means of the subcategories for the participants that were current sorority members indicate that overall facial appearance was of greater importance to them than were individual facial features which, in turn, were more important than the disadvantages associated with their body, et cetera. The subcategory that had the highest mean was overall facial appearance at 4.63 (n = 16). The questions dealing with weight held the lowest mean at 3.0208 (n = 16).

Table 13 – Non-Sorority Members Subcategories Means

Subcategories	n	M	SD
Individual facial features	52	4.7815	0.59258
Overall facial appearance	52	4.3500	1.04600
Disadvantages	52	4.3205	1.18627
Individual body parts	52	4.0135	0.91688
Comparing	52	3.6763	1.33839
Overall body appearance	51	3.6700	1.38100
Exercise	52	3.2837	0.80985
Weight	52	3.2372	1.12282
General body	52	3.2308	1.13094

Items in table 13 represent the rank ordering of non-sorority members regarding their overall concerns with their physical appearances. For example, means of the subcategories for the participants that were non-sorority members indicate that individual facial features was of greater importance to them than was their overall facial appearance which, in turn, was more important than the disadvantages associated with their body, et cetera. The subcategory related to the participants individual facial features held the highest mean at 4.7815 (n = 52). The subcategory that held the lowest mean was related to the participant's perceptions of their general body image at 3.2308 (n = 52).

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

The research conducted in the present study was designed to explore the perceptions of current sorority members and non-sorority members regarding their perceptions of their body image. In this chapter, the discussion will entail a comparison of the findings from prior research to findings in the current study; a list of conclusions drawn and presented via research questions; and lists of recommendations for future researchers and Student Affairs professionals charged with the responsibility of working with sorority and non-sorority women.

Discussion

Upon reviewing the survey responses and statistical analysis for all participants and subgroups, several themes emerged. The following discussion outlines common themes found during data collection and findings from relevant literature regarding sorority and non-sorority women and their body images.

Basow, Foran and Bookwala (2007) and Landa and Bybee (2007) both noted that the sororities attract women who are likely to engage in negative thinking about their body. Current sorority members in the present study, however, did not seem to have more of a negative body image than did women who were not members of a sorority. There were certain physical features that current sorority women felt more positively about concerning their individual body parts and overall appearance; more so than did non-sorority members. However, current sorority members did compare their bodies more often to others than did non-sorority members.

When looking at the information provided about participants comparing their bodies to other women and being self-conscious of their bodies in front of the opposite sex, it seemed to affirm the conclusions that were made by Levitt (2004). While Levitt was concerned about

eating disorders, the conclusions drawn regarding why women engage in eating disorder behavior and consistently compare their bodies to others is grounded in negative self perceptions of their bodies (especially the perceptions of men). Thomsen (2002) also concluded that the greatest predictor of how women feel about their body image is how they think men perceive them. Participants in the present study stated that they were often more self-conscious of their bodies around members of their own gender. However, one general conclusion that can be drawn from the findings in the current study is that one of the main predictors of the participants' body image concerns is related to members of either gender.

In the present study, participants were found to be very dissatisfied with the size of their abdomen. This is in keeping with the conclusions drawn by Hoyt and Kogan (2001) in which women were found to be much more dissatisfied with their "abdomen, waist, buttocks, and thighs" than were men (p. 216). Hoyt and Kogan conducted a study using a similar survey instrument to the one used in the present study on both males and females during which they sought to determine how their participants felt about their body image and satisfaction with their relationships between both peers and significant others. They found that their female participants felt more positively about their overall appearance, in certain aspects, than they had expected. This is also in keeping with findings in the present study: both current sorority members and non-sorority members felt relatively positive about their overall body appearance.

The literature that was reviewed made many connections to disordered eating and body image. While the present study did not address eating disorders, the questions relating to participants feelings towards their weight and exercise could be in relation to the conclusions made in the literature about disordered eating. The participants in the current study overwhelmingly did not feel positive about how much they weighted ($M = 2.85$) and even

though many of participants stated that they exercised often ($M = 3.58$), they only sometimes ($M = 2.85$) felt that they were physically fit. How people feel about their weight, no matter if they were overweight, average weight or underweight, and how much they exercised, if they did not have a positive self perception, they can and may engage in disordered eating patterns.

Conclusions

Based on participant responses in the present study, the following conclusions are drawn.

1. While research was not conducted on how accepting participants are of themselves, it seems that their conceptualization of their overall body image did have an impact on their level of self-acceptance. The majority of women felt very positively about their facial features and did not feel their body was a disadvantage to them socially, athletically and sexually. However, the majority of the women also felt negatively towards the size of their abdomen as well as their weight, no matter how physically fit they were. It is important to note that the majority of participants did not perceive themselves to be in good physical condition.
2. When reviewing the current research conducted on current sorority members and those who were no longer members, there were no conclusive data to confirm the extent that self-acceptance influenced sorority membership. The reason for this is based on the low number of responses received from women that were no longer members of a sorority and the primary researcher did not ask if they were no longer a member due to their body image.
3. When addressing women and how they feel about their body image related to their undergraduate status, no conclusions could be drawn. The majority of the participants ($n = 61$ or 89.7%) were first year students and therefore it cannot be

decisively determined whether there was a difference between undergraduate status and how the participants felt about their body image.

4. When reviewing responses based on subcategory status and the statistical data, the physical characteristics that sorority members were most pleased with was their overall facial appearance. Thus, when current sorority members evaluated their face as a whole, they felt more positive toward it than the individual parts of their face and overall body image.
5. When reviewing the findings based on subcategories and the statistical data, the physical characteristics that non-sorority members were most pleased with were their individual facial features. Therefore, all questions relating to their individual facial features (e.g., ears, nose, eyes, lips, etc.) were, on average, rated higher than their overall facial appearance.
6. The findings based on the subcategories for both current sorority members and non-sorority members had questions relating to the participants' weight being a concern.

Recommendations

For student affairs practitioners, the following suggestions are put forth:

1. Advisors of a sorority, as well as student affairs practitioners, who may help students with issues relating to body image, should read the literature that is currently in publication relating to college women, especially sorority women and their body image.
2. Professionals who advise a sorority should look into getting a dietary specialist or counselor to talk to the women in each organization about eating disorders and negative body images. There is an overwhelming amount of information concluding that sorority

women are more likely to engage in disordered eating than those who are not in a sorority.

3. Advisors for sororities and those who work directly with recruitment processes should work to develop new ways to articulate the reasons prospective members are not being asked to join their organization. It should also be communicated through an advisor as to what the requirements are to join the organization and making sure those do not infringe on the physicality of the recruits.
4. Student affairs practitioners working with college aged women need to be aware of the resources within the institution, as well as outside of the institution, that may be able to help the women who are struggling with their body image and self-perception. Practitioners should work with those resources to develop information via flyers, internet, and other avenues that detail support that can be found throughout campus such as Counseling Services.

For future research, the following suggestions are put forth:

1. Include women who are no longer members of a sorority and inquire whether they are no longer members of a sorority because of body image issues.
2. Distribute the survey at a different time during the academic year. Surveys for the current research study were distributed during the spring semester during Greek Week activities. Times when members of the Greek community were heavily involved in such events should be avoided, whenever possible.
3. Send out a second mailing to students reminding them of the survey and again, requesting participation. While the door postings utilized as second reminders in the present study were effective (i.e., additional 20 responses resulted), a third email reminder sent a few

days before the survey was no longer available (statement indicating when the opportunity to participate is going to be terminated) might encourage more women to respond.

4. Adding survey questions that are related to eating disorders and how many women have or currently engage in disordered eating behaviors, and how media plays a role in women's body image might want to be considered. The literature reviewed for the present study specifically relates to eating disorders and mass media. Therefore, including questions about those items might result in more relevant information about the participant's feelings toward their bodies.
5. Engaging in one-on-one interviews along with the survey instrument might enhance understanding of how and why the participants feel the way they do about their bodies and how they perceive it.
6. Every attempt should be made to solicit a larger sample of women participants and women who are non-freshman students.

Summary Statement

Whereas this entire research project has focused on current sorority women and non-sorority women's perceptions of their body image, findings suggest the need to research further the constructs that inform college women's perceptions of themselves (e.g., mass media, dieting fads, social norms, eating disorders, cosmetic surgery, family background, interpersonal relationships, etc.). While the current study was one of the first to compare sorority and non-sorority women and their perceptions of their body images, as well as looking at specific parts of the face and body, it would seem that body image is something that is constructed individually and personal. It is hoped that future research will add to our understanding of how sorority

members and those who are not members form perceptions of their own bodies. Educators and student affairs practitioners should aim to comprehensively understand college women and the issues they have and may experience with their body image, giving particular attention to the implementation of services, programs, and organizations that are needed to bring further support to an otherwise overlooked student issue.

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APPENDIX A
Survey Instrument

Perceptions of Body Image

1. Undergraduate status:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

2. Other

3. Please identify your ethnic background (check all that apply):

- African American
- Asian American
- Caucasian American
- Hispanic American
- Native American
- Non-American Citizen
- Other

4. Are you currently a member of a sorority?

- Yes
- No

5. Have you ever been a member of a sorority?

- Yes
- No

6. Did you participate in sorority recruitment?

- Yes
- No

7. Do you plan on joining a sorority as an undergraduate?

- Yes
- No

The following questions relate to how satisfied you are with the way your body looks

8. How satisfied are you with the shape of your body?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very Often
- Always

9. How confident are you with your body?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very Often
- Always

10. How often are you satisfied with your weight?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

11. How often do you weigh yourself or try and control your weight?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

12. How often do you wish to change the shape of parts of your body?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

13. Have you ever felt that your body image is a disadvantage to you socially?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

14. Have you ever felt that your body is a disadvantage to you athletically?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

15. Have you ever felt that your body is a disadvantage to you sexually?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

16. How frequently do you exercise in order to alter your body shape?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

17. How frequently are you discontent or ashamed of your body build?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

18. Are you concerned about how toned and firm your muscles are?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

19. Do you feel that you are as strong as you would like to be?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often Always

28. Eyes:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

29. Ears:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

30. Nose:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

31. Lips:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

32. Teeth:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

33. Chin:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

34. Neck:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

35. Complexion:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

36. Overall facial attractiveness:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

37. Shoulders:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

38. Breasts:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

39. Arms:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

40. Hands:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

41. Size of abdomen ("stomach"/"belly"):

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

42. Buttocks ("butt"):

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

43. Hips:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

44. Legs:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

45. Ankles:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

46. General muscle tone or development:

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

47. How satisfied are you with your overall body appearance?

Extremely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied
	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	

48. When evaluating your own body, what rank would you give yourself on a scale of 1 - 10?
 With 1 being the worst and 10 being perfect

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

APPENDIX B
Letter/Email to Participants

Dear Student,

My name is Amy Piekarski and I am the Associate Resident Director in Carman Hall. Presently, I am conducting research for my master's thesis. The focus of my thesis is women's feelings about their body image. I invite you to please take about 15 minutes and complete the anonymous survey. Based on the initial response rate to this initial request for participants, some of you may be afforded an opportunity to take this survey again in two weeks. There is minimal risk to you in taking the survey or continued participation in the research study. Possible risks include emotional discomfort when answering questions regarding your attitudes towards your own body. There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. However, potential benefits to society include an improved understanding of college women's attitudes toward their body. I would appreciate your time and willingness to do this and if you choose, you may enter your e-mail address at the end of the survey to be entered in a raffle for a \$50.00 gift certificate to Walmart. Your participation will be very beneficial to my research.

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

To take the survey, please follow the link below or copy and paste the link into a new browser: <http://www.eiu.edu/cats/csd/alpiekarski/survey.php>

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

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You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

Thank you very much,

Amy L. Piekarski
Associate Resident Director
Carman Hall
Eastern Illinois University
alpiekarski@eiu.edu

APPENDIX C
Door Reminder for Participants

Dear (students names),

Please do not forget about the opportunity to win a \$50.00 gift card to Walmart! All you need to do is fill out the survey that was sent to you via e-mail by Amy Piekarski last week!!

<http://www.eiu.edu/cats/csd/alpiekarski/survey.php>

It is a great opportunity and I do not want you to miss out. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions!

Thank you ☺

(My signature)