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Ideal Female and Male Bodies: An Analysis of College Students' Drawings

Shannon K. Carter
University of Central Florida, skcarter@mail.ucf.edu

Michelle M. Ortiz
University of Central Florida, n/a@mail.ucs.edu

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Shannon K. Carter and Michelle M. Ortiz

University of Central Florida

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates perceptions of gendered body ideals through an analysis of college students' drawings. A sample of 94 college students participated by drawing their image of the ideal female and male bodies. The drawings were analyzed through a gender lens, whereby each participant's male and female bodies were compared to determine the features participants used to indicate gender in their ideal bodies. Four major themes emerged that distinguished ideal female and male bodies from each other: (1) body shape, (2) body size, (3) clothing and accessories, and (4) gender roles. An additional theme includes a small group of participants who challenged gendered body ideals. The results are discussed in the broader context of gender and the body.

IDEAL FEMALE AND MALE BODIES:
AN ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' DRAWINGS

Ideal body types for men and women vary by culture and across time. In the United States, the ideal female body has cycled for centuries between larger, voluptuous bodies and smaller, thinner bodies (Yalom 1997). A society's body ideals are important to study because they impact individuals' evaluations of their own bodies and the practices they engage in to shape their bodies. The ways in which a society's body ideals are gendered reflect the society's expectations for gendered behaviors and practices (Crawley, Foley and Shehan 2008). Much social science research has focused on identifying the ideal female and male bodies in the United States. These studies often ask participants to identify the body types they believe are most desirable from a set of pre-selected images (Ayala, Mickens, Galindo and Elder 2007; Fallon and Rozin 1985; Forbes et al. 2001; Lynch and Zellner 1999; Nollen et al. 2006; Rozin and Fallon 1988; Silberstein et al. 1988) or analyze images of ideal bodies in popular culture (Bessenoff and Priore 2007; Bordo 1993; Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert 2007). The current study examines perceptions of ideal female and male bodies through an analysis of college students' drawings. The focus of the study is to identify the features students use to gender their representations of ideal bodies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ideal Bodies

Much research concurs that there are ideal body types in the U.S. that differ for men and women. The ideal body type for women in the United States today is a "curvaceously thin" body that is characterized by small hips and waist and a large bust (Harrison 2003). This female body is thin with toned muscles, large breasts and very low body fat (Furnham, Dias and McClelland 1998; Markulo 1995). Zones (2005) further specifies that the ideal female body in U.S. culture is young and white. The ideal male body in U.S. society is best described as a "muscleman," with broad shoulders and disproportionately large chest and arm muscles (Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein and Striegal-Moore 1986). This male body is tall, muscular, hairless and very low in body fat (Bordo 1999; Cohn and Adler 1992; Labre 2002; Petrie et al. 1996).

Perpetuating Body Ideals

In determining the source of body ideals, much research points to the media (Ballentine and Ogle 2005; Bordo 1993; Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert 2007; Markulo 1995; Petrie et al. 1996; Spitzer, Henderson and Zivian 1999; Zones 2005). For example, typical female models are found to be 9% taller and 16% thinner than average American women (Zones 2005). The bodies of female models in *Playboy* magazine and Miss America Pageant winners are found to be much smaller than average women (Spitzer, Henderson and Zivian 1999), and have become smaller over time (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz and Thompson 1980; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann and Ahrens 1992).

Regarding gender differences, research shows that media images of male bodies do not vary as greatly in size and shape from average adult male bodies (Spitzer, Henderson and Zivian 1999). Although ideal men in the media are portrayed as tall and

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muscular, their height, weight and body proportions do not deviate from those of average men as much as images of female bodies do. McKinley (1998:114) suggests, "Because of these images, desire for weight change may be more extreme and less attainable for women than for men and this may account for some of the gender differences in body esteem." Nevertheless, media images of male bodies are becoming increasingly muscular over time (Leit, Pope and Gray 2001), and more males are targeted with these images through "health and fitness" magazines (Labre 2002) and toy action figures (Pope, Olivardia, Gruber and Borowiecki 1999).

       Ideal bodies in the media are often accompanied by verbal and/or written reinforcements that suggest these bodies are realistic, attainable and worthy of numerous rewards. The achievement of an ideal body is associated in the media with greater happiness (Malkin, Wornian and Chrisler 1999), increased sexual satisfaction (Fouts and Burggraf 1999), wealth, health (White and Gillett 1994) and overall power and control (Petrie et al. 1996). Media messages also indicate that not attaining an ideal body or lacking specific ideal characteristics will result in negative consequences such as self-consciousness, shame and embarrassment (Markula 1995). Popular women's magazines often provide diet and weight loss advice so readers can attempt to attain the bodies they see on the pages (Andersen and DiDomenico 1992; Ballentine and Ogle 2005; Malkin, Wornian and Chrisler 1999). Even food advertisements send messages that women need to restrict caloric intake by portraying women eating only tiny morsels of food, or consuming food in private, whereas men are portrayed consuming large servings of food in public (Bordo 1993).

       While the media certainly plays a role in contributing to unrealistic body ideals in U.S. society, it is not the only institution that contributes to the perpetuation of these ideals. It is estimated that Americans spend approximately $50 billion each year attempting to achieve societal standards of beauty. This money is spent on diet programs, health and fitness clubs, cosmetics and cosmetic surgery (Zones 2005); these industries clearly benefit from the continuation of body ideals that are difficult or impossible for most individuals to achieve. The medical and health insurance industries, along with the U.S. government, also play a role in perpetuating these ideals by actively promoting certain body size recommendations (Czerniawski 2007). Czerniawski traces the evolution of body standards promoted by the life insurance industry whereby health concerns over low body weight in the late 1800s and early 1900s transformed into concerns regarding overweight and obesity. Originally used to assess risk in the life insurance industry, height and weight tables (or body-mass index scales) are now used as standards Americans are encouraged – by physicians, insurance companies and federal health initiatives – to meet.

Consequences of Body Ideals

       A significant consequence of unattainable body ideals is that many Americans are dissatisfied with their bodies. It is well established in the literature that exposure to media images of ideal bodies is related to increased body dissatisfaction among females of all ages, including preadolescent girls (Dohnt and Tiggemann 2006), adolescent girls (Clay, Vignoles and Dittmar 2005; Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2002), college-age women (Bedford and Johnson 2006; Cusumano and Thompson 1997; Goodman and Walsh-Childers 2004; Spitzer, Henderson and Zivian 1999; Thornton and Maurice 1997;

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Vartanian, Giant and Passino 2001), adult women (Green and Pritchard 2003; Hamilton, Mintz and Kashubeck-West 2007) and older women aged 65-74 (Bedford and Johnson 2006). The overwhelming majority of college-age women consistently express dissatisfaction with their bodies (Spitzer, Henderson and Zivian 1999), often perceiving their bodies as much bigger than they actually are (Monteath and McCabe 1997). Typically only those women who are below 90% of their medically-expected body weight report feeling thin (Spitzer, Henderson and Zivian 1999). Exposure to thin models is also associated with decreased self-esteem (Clay, Vignoles and Dittmar 2005; Cusumano and Thompson 1997; Thornton and Maurice 1997) and self-confidence (Hargreaves and Tiggeman 2002), and increased body-focused anxiety (Halliwell and Dittmar 2004; Thornton and Maurice 1997) and weight concerns (Posavac, Posavac and Posavac 1998). Exposure to realistic and varying body types is not shown to have these effects on women (Halliwell and Dittmar 2004; Posavac, Posavac and Posavac 1998).

Exposure to ideal media images of male bodies also has negative consequences for preadolescent and adolescent boys (Cusumano and Thompson 2001; Ricciardelli, McCabe, Lillis and Thomas 2006), college-age men (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn 2004; Lorenzen, Grieve and Thomas 2004; Lynch and Zellner 1999; Vartanian, Giant and Passino 2001), and gay and heterosexual adult men (Duggan and McCreary 2004). Most adolescent and college-age men report a desire to change their body size, especially to increase muscularity (Nollen et al. 2006; Vartanian, Giant and Passino 2001), and typically overestimate their female and male peers' perceptions of the ideal male body (Lynch and Zellner 1999). Exposure to muscular male models is related to increased depression (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn 2004), muscle dissatisfaction (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn 2004) and body dissatisfaction (Duggan and McCreary 2004; Lorenzen, Grieve and Thomas 2004). These effects are not found in relation to exposure to neutral media images (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn 2004).

Dissatisfaction with one's own body drives many individuals to seek ways to alter their bodies. Many women – young women in particular – resort to extreme measures such as eating disorders in attempt to lose weight. It is estimated that approximately one-sixth of American college women struggle with anorexia and/or bulimia (Zones 2005), and young girls are increasingly at risk for intense dieting and eating disorders. Close to 80% of ten and eleven year old girls have tried dieting because they consider themselves fat (Zones 2005). Research demonstrates a direct relationship between exposure to body ideals and eating disorders in young women (Fouts and Burggraf 1999; Harrison 2003; Harrison and Cantor 1997; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw and Stein 1994).

For men, common methods of attempting to attain the ideal male body include the use of anabolic steroids and dietary supplements. Steroid use is increasing among adolescent and college men (White and Gillet 1994), with an estimated 3-12% of male high school students having used steroids (Labre 2002). Further, "megarexia," the condition in which men focus obsessively on muscle gain and continue to perceive themselves as not muscular enough regardless of their actual size, is becoming increasingly common among young men, and is suggested to have an influence on steroid abuse (White and Gillet 1994).

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Broader Societal Consequences

 In addition to contributing to unhealthy body images and practices among individuals in society, some scholars argue that the idealization of certain body types perpetuates social inequalities. A number of feminist theorists point out that the thin beauty ideal for women has historically coincided with women's political and economic gains (Hesse-Biber 1996; Wolf 1992). That is, cultural standards for feminine beauty have been most forceful in the media and difficult to attain at times when women gain power in other social realms. The powerful force of these body ideals lure women into focusing time and energy on disciplining their bodies to meet societal expectations rather than directing their attention toward social, political and economic equality (Bartky 1990).

 While there is mounting evidence that male body ideals have become more prevalent and difficult to attain in recent years, resulting in an increased focus on the body among men of all ages, Davis (2002) warns against the interpretation of this trend as an indication of increasing gender equality. In particular, she argues that beauty does not relate to masculinity in the same way that it relates to femininity. "For masculinity, which is guided by the dictates of rationality ('mind over matter'), the body is, at best, irrelevant, and, at worst, an intrusive obstacle to the more important activities of the mind" (Davis 2002:59). Therefore, men cannot obtain masculinity through "beauty," or any kind of focus on obtaining the ideal body, whereas women do obtain femininity through beauty and body practices.

 Gender differences in body ideals also reinforce gender dichotomies, or what Crawley, Foley and Shehan (2008) call the "gender box structure." Crawley and colleagues (2008:16) define the gender box structure as "Binary gender messages in the social world [that] tell us to typify each person as either 'female' or 'male' and apply assumptions about bodies, gender, and sexual orientation." Within this box structure, the authors argue, "sex, gender, and sexual orientation are fused and assumed to be attached to biological bodies" (2008:16). In addition, the authors argue the boxes are separate and mutually exclusive, suggesting that all "normal" individuals must fit into only one of the two boxes. Following the gender box structure, the more we are exposed to images that portray female and male bodies as different from each other, the more we come to see women and men as fundamentally different from one another.

Restatement of Purpose

 The current project examines college students' perceptions of sex differences in ideal bodies by analyzing their drawings of ideal female and male bodies. Previous research on body ideals has asked participants to identify the body types they believe are most desirable from a set of pre-selected images (Ayala, Mickens, Galindo and Elder 2007; Fallon and Rozin 1985; Forbes et al. 2001; Lynch and Zellner 1999; Nollen et al. 2006; Rozin and Fallon 1988; Silberstein et al. 1988) or analyze images of ideal bodies in popular culture (Bessenoff and Priore 2007; Bordo 1993; Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert 2007). The current project differs from previous research on body ideals in that participants have the freedom and creative power to construct their own images rather than evaluate images provided by the researchers.

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Theoretical Framework

In *Gendering Bodies*, Crawley, Foley and Shehan (2008) argue that male and female bodies become gendered through social practice. They argue that individuals continuously receive gendered cultural messages about their bodies and, in turn, move their bodies in ways that (often) conform to those gendered expectations. The authors argue, "although we are all born with different bodily potentialities, *our bodies are constantly being gendered – that is, encouraged to participate in (heterosexual) gender conformity*" (2008:xiii, emphasis in original). Gendered bodily activities include but are not limited to diet, movement, exercise, surgery, clothing and gestures. The result of these gendered bodily activities is some degree of conformity with culturally prescribed gendered bodies, which, in turn, reinforces gendered body ideals.

Crawley and colleagues (2008) argue that gendered expectations about the body are so engrained in our culture that we tend to view the gendered body as resulting from nature and biology rather than society and culture. The authors point out that male and female bodies are overwhelmingly similar in their structure, with genitals even deriving from the same material during fetal development. Within this context of overwhelming similarity between male and female bodies, there is great variation in the size and structure of human bodies; however, much of this variation does not conform to our expectations for gendered body differences. For example, our common cultural expectation is that men are larger than women, yet there are plenty of examples of women who are larger than men. Rather than revise our expectations for gendered body differences, we tend to disregard the many examples that contradict them. This process reinforces cultural expectations for gendering bodies.

The current research project explores the extent to which college student participants rely on cultural messages regarding gendered bodies in their own artistic depictions of ideal female and male bodies. The analysis focuses not so much on the ideal bodies themselves that the participants create, but the ways in which the participants gender those bodies. Therefore, each participant's male and female body are analyzed together to identify the characteristics that are used to distinguish the ideal female body from the ideal male body and the ideal male body from the ideal female body.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data

Participants for this study were asked to draw a picture of the ideal female and male bodies. They were assured that artistic ability was not important and that any type of drawing would be useful for the study. Participants were also asked to provide their gender, age and race at the top of their drawings.

Drawings have been used in previous research to explore individuals' perceptions of a variety of topics, including health (Wetton and McWhirter 1998), illness (Gonzalez-Rivera and Bauermeister 2007), family (O'Brien et al. 1996), self (Wakefield and Underwager 1998) and the elderly (Barrett and Cantwell 2007). Some researchers argue that drawings are particularly useful for analyzing topics that may by less overtly accessible by some participants or susceptible to social desirability effects (Barrett and Cantwell 2007; Gonzalez-Rivera and Bauermeister 2007; Levy and Banaji 2002).

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Information portrayed in drawings may reflect more implicit ideas and attitudes held by participants that may not necessarily be revealed in a survey or interview setting (Levy and Banaji 2002). In their analysis of college students' drawings of the elderly, Barrett and Cantwell (2007: 345) state, "sketches may involve less conscious reflection on particular qualities of elders and may, therefore, provide a more accurate reflection of age-related attitudes and perceptions." Drawings were used in the current study to investigate the characteristics participants use to distinguish ideal male from ideal female bodies. This research method may tap into some of the more implicit characteristics participants use to assign gender to human bodies.

Sample

Participants for this study consisted of a convenience sample of 94 undergraduate students at a large, public university in the southeastern United States. Participants were recruited from three introductory sociology courses. Sixty-three percent (n=59) of participants were women, 34% (n=32) were men, and 3% (n=3) did not report their gender. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 23. Unfortunately, racial statistics were only collected for two of the three classes involved. Among participants for whom we have information on race (n=41), 66% (n=27) were white, 17% (n=7) Hispanic, 15% (n=6) Black, and 2% (n=1) identified as biracial. These participants are not representative of any particular population; therefore, caution should be used in generalizing beyond these particular participants. In addition, because our information on participants' race was limited, we do not have the capacity to compare depictions of ideal bodies by race.

Data Analysis

We analyzed our data using the content analysis method outlined by Gillian Rose (2001). Rose points out that content analysis of visual images typically entails both quantitative and qualitative analysis, and follows a rigorous set of steps. The quantitative component of content analysis consists of counting the number of images that fit into each of the categories identified. Rose argues that this quantitative component is important because it verifies the patterns the researchers think they see in the data, therefore avoiding a potential bias of remembering those images that confirm the researchers' expectations and discarding those that contradict. The qualitative component entails the creation of categories for coding and the interpretation of each image as belonging to one or another category.

According to Rose (2001), the first step in content analysis of visual images (after obtaining the data) is the creation of categories. Following Rose, our data analysis began with a preliminary review of each drawing in which we searched for prevalent themes. We were looking in particular for the features that distinguished each student's drawing of the ideal female body from the same student's drawing of the ideal male body. Throughout the preliminary review, we made a list of specific characteristics that were used as gender markers for the ideal bodies. We then condensed our themes by grouping similar categories together; for example, the original categories of "high heels" and "jewelry" were combined into the broader category of "clothing and accessories."

Rose (2001) argues that the categories used for content analysis must exhibit three characteristics: they must be exhaustive, exclusive and enlightening. In order to be

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exhaustive, "every aspect of the images with which the research is concerned must be covered by one category" (Rose 2001:65). We met this criteria in our study by making sure that every item on our original list of themes was captured by one of the broad categories. We ensured that our categories were exclusive by creating categories that did not overlap with one another. This means that a single drawing may fit into more than one category, however the particular characteristic that makes the drawing fit into one category does not also make that drawing fit into another category. Hence, the categories themselves are exclusive. Finally, for categories to be enlightening, they must provide insight into the topic of study. Our categories are enlightening because they point to physical and social markers that our participants used to gender their ideal bodies that have not been found in research of this nature.

Once categories are created, the next step is to code each image into the categories (Rose 2001). During this stage of data analysis, we re-analyzed each drawing individually to determine which category (or categories) each drawing fit into. We recorded each code on the sheet of paper that contained the image and used a separate sheet of paper to record the frequencies in each category. We separated the frequencies by the gender of the participant. We also recorded all of the written comments that accompanied the images in each category.

Finally, we calculated the percent of drawings that fell into each of the five major themes as a whole and by the gender of the participant. It is important to note that the final categories are not exclusive, as most drawings fell into two or more categories.

Study Limitations

This study is based on a convenience sample of college students at one public university who voluntarily enrolled in introductory sociology courses. These participants are not representative of any particular population, college student or non-college student, and therefore the results should not be generalized beyond this particular group of students. In addition, race data were not collected for all of the students; therefore, comparisons of ideal bodies by the race of the participants cannot be made. Some participants made race indicators on their ideal bodies, suggesting (implicitly or explicitly) that the ideal male or female body is of a particular race. While we can analyze racial indicators on the participants' depictions of ideal bodies, we do not necessarily have access to the race of the participants who are attributing racial characteristics to their depictions of ideal bodies. In other words, we do not know which participants are suggesting that the ideal body is of a particular race.

RESULTS

Body Shape

The main themes that emerged from the drawings that distinguished students' representations of ideal female and male bodies are: (1) body shape, (2) body size, (3) clothing and accessories, (4) gender roles, and (5) challenges to body ideals. Each theme is described in more depth below.

Many respondents used body shape as a main distinguishing feature between female and male bodies. Sixty-eight percent of female respondents and 69% of male respondents used breasts and/or muscles to define women and men, respectively. The

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female bodies often have very small waists and either hourglass figures with large breasts (46% of the sample) or narrow-hipped, adolescent-type bodies with large breasts (30%). The majority of drawings in this category portray men as having large muscles and women as having large breasts. The most common muscles drawn on male bodies are biceps (43% of the sample) and six-pack abdominal muscles (36%). Many of the male bodies in this category also have very broad shoulders.

One example of a drawing in which body shape is the main distinguishing feature between female and male bodies is illustrated in Figure 1. The female body represented in this picture has disproportionately large breasts, a thin waist and an hourglass figure – characteristics that were common among drawings in this theme. The female body in Figure 1 is also different from many of the drawings in this category because of her well-defined muscles. The body depicted in this drawing has muscular arms and legs and a four-pack abdominal structure. While the hourglass figure is typical of female bodies in this category, well-defined muscles were not as common on female bodies.

The male body in Figure 1 is also extremely muscular. His muscles are large and distinctive, and he has so little fat on his body that even his collarbones are noticeable. The width of his shoulders is nearly twice the width of the woman's shoulders. These features – wide shoulders and well-defined muscles – were common among the drawings of male bodies in this theme.
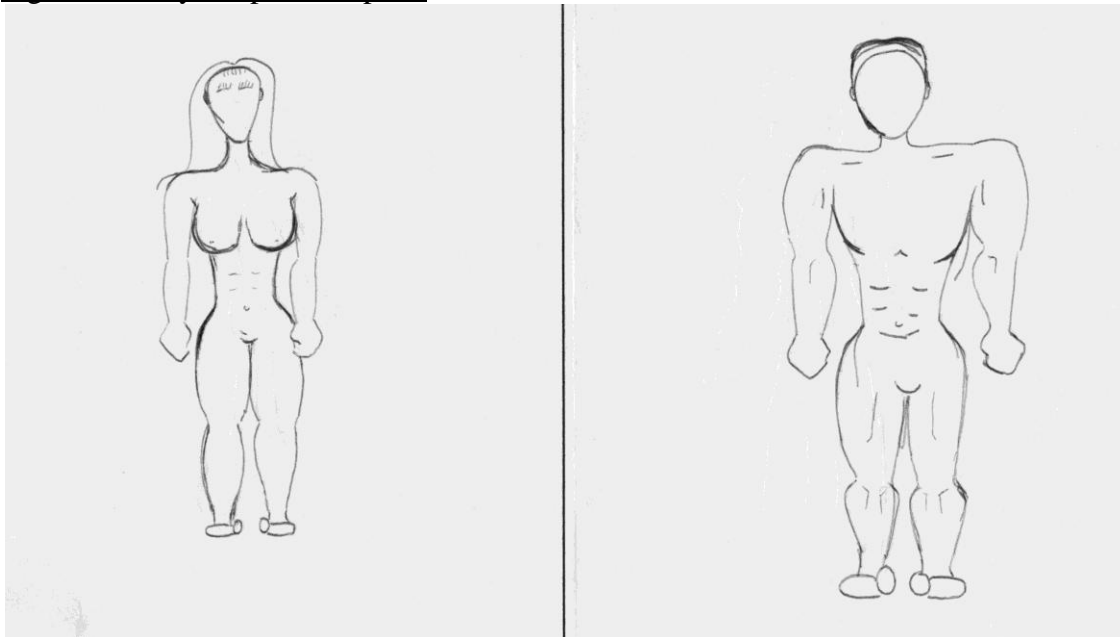
Figure 1: Body Shape Example 1

Figure 2 displays another common type of drawing in which body shape is the main distinguishing feature between the female and male bodies. This drawing depicts stick figures that are nearly identical, however the female body has breasts whereas the male body does not. Drawings such as these could be analyzed to imply that the male body is neutral and sex-less, while the female body is a derivation of the neutral with the addition of breasts. Stick figures such as these, with the addition of breasts on female

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bodies, and/or the addition of muscles on the arms of the male bodies, were common throughout the sample.

Figure 2 is also significant in that it is exemplary of many others in which participants elaborated on their drawings with written comments. Because the written comments in Figure 2 are particularly relevant to the second category, body size, they will be discussed in the next section. Some examples of adjectives used to describe the female bodies in the body shape category were: "C-D cup" (referring to the size of the ideal female body's breasts), "abnormally thin," "big breasts," "tiny waist," "cute butt," and "long legs." For the male bodies, some examples of adjectives used were: "not too skinny, not too big," "big biceps," "perfectly toned 6-pack," "tall," "strong" and "muscular."

Figure 2: Body Shape Example 2
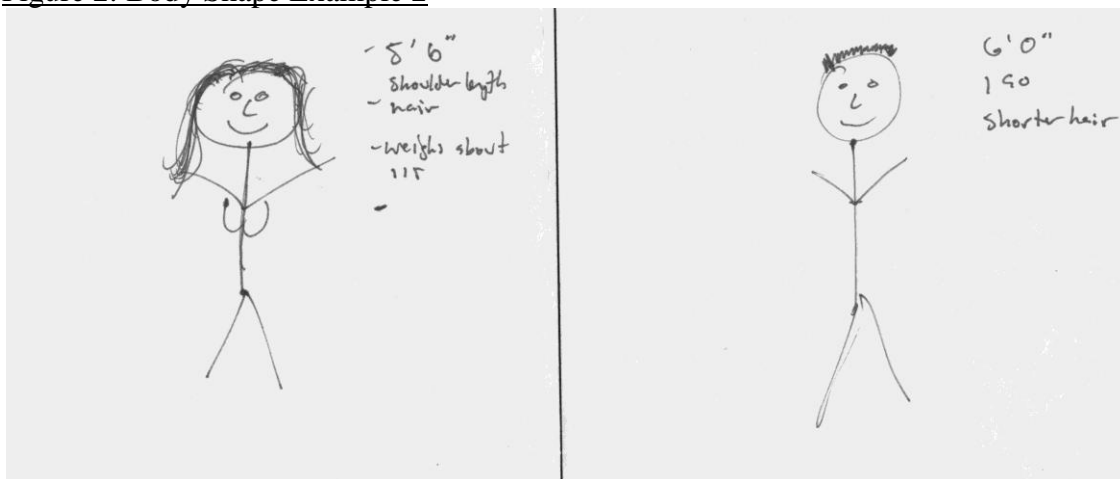
Some written comments in this theme also suggested a particular age associated with the ideal body. Comments such as "non-sagging breasts" and "perfectly toned muscles" suggest that the ideal body is a young adult body. Other participants specified that the ideal bodies were "young," "18" and "21." These ideals are consistent with our cultural association of beauty with youth (Bordo 1993; Wolf 1992; Zones 2005).

Body Size

The second theme is differences in body size. Many participants created male bodies that were significantly larger in size than their female counterparts. Thirty-six percent (n=21) of women and 31% (n=10) of men used discrepancies in body size as a primary distinguishing feature between the ideal female and male bodies.

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Figure 3: Body Size Example
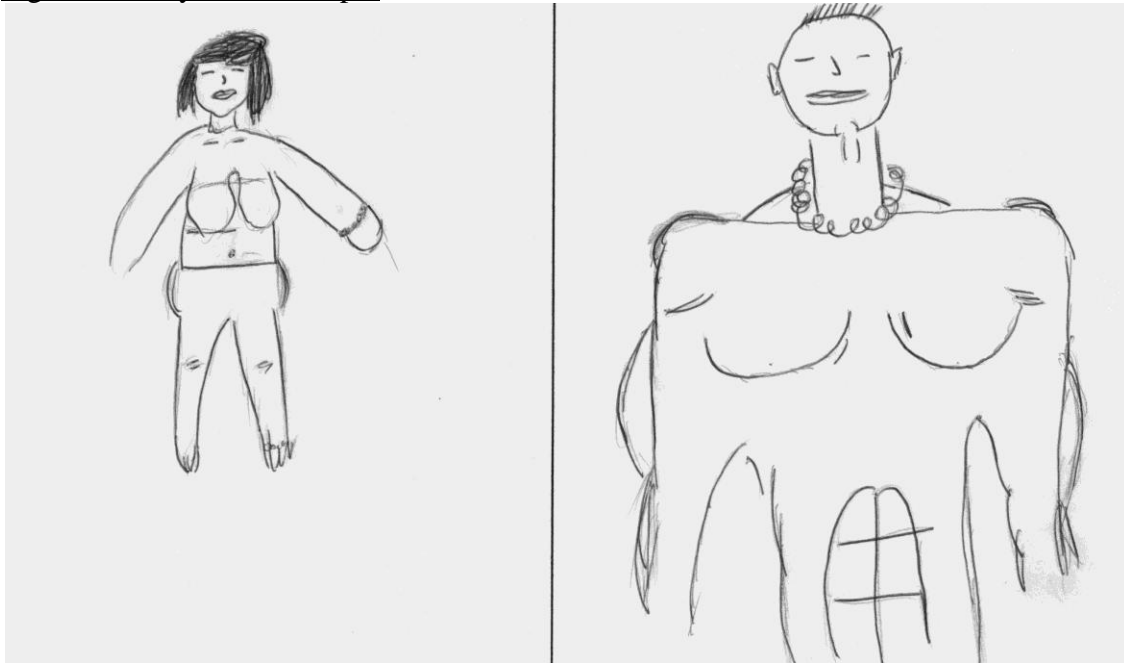
One example of discrepancy in body size is displayed in Figure 3. The male body depicted in this picture is so large that only his upper body fits on the page. Conversely, the entire female body is smaller in height and overall size than the portion of the male body depicted in the drawing. Depictions such as this were common in the sample, whereby male bodies were depicted as overwhelmingly large compared to their female counterparts, rather than more subtle differences in height and width.

Some participants also included written comments for the actual sizes of their ideal bodies. For example, several respondents noted height and weight specifications, such as the following comments describing ideal male bodies: "6' – 6'3" and 185 to 200 pounds," "6'0" and 190 lbs.," and "between 5'9" and 6'5"." Written comments describing ideal female bodies include: "5'6" and 115 pounds" and "5'4" to 5'6" and size 5."

Clothing and Accessories
The use of clothing and accessories to distinguish between ideal female and male bodies was another common theme. Seventy-eight percent (n=46) of women and 50% (n=16) of men used clothing and accessories in their drawings to emphasize gender differences. The primary clothing differences were depictions of female bodies in skirts, dresses or short shorts, and male bodies in pants or long shorts. Included in this category are decorative accessories, such as jewelry, bows and shoes. Also included in this category are depictions of the use of cosmetics and popular gendered grooming practices, such as hair length, facial hair and leg hair removal.
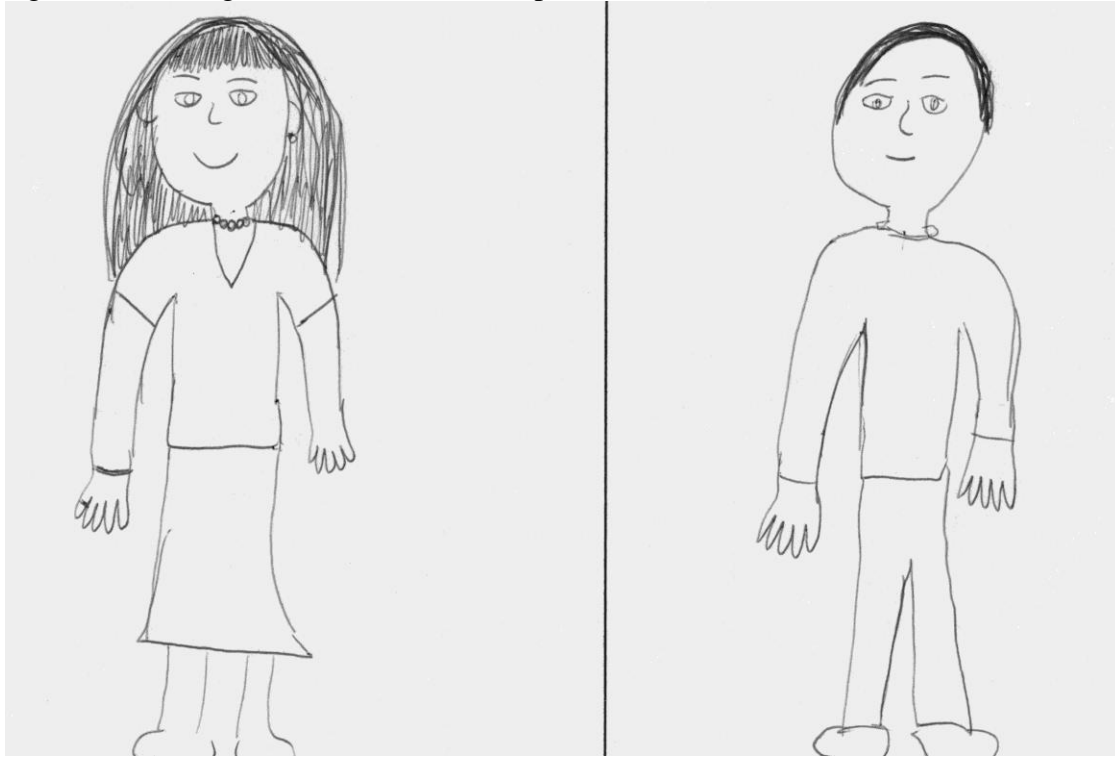
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Figure 4: Clothing and Accessories Example 1

Figure 4 demonstrates the use of clothing and accessories to distinguish the ideal female body from the ideal male body. The two bodies are nearly identical in size and shape, yet the gender of each is indicated by clothing and accessories. The skirt, long hair and jewelry on the female body in contrast to the male's short hair and pants indicate the gender of each body. This example is significant in that it relies solely on social characteristics rather than physical ones to distinguish one gender from the other. While the first two categories of body shape and size imply that the main differences between female and male bodies are physical, this drawing suggests that differences in gendered bodies are mainly social.
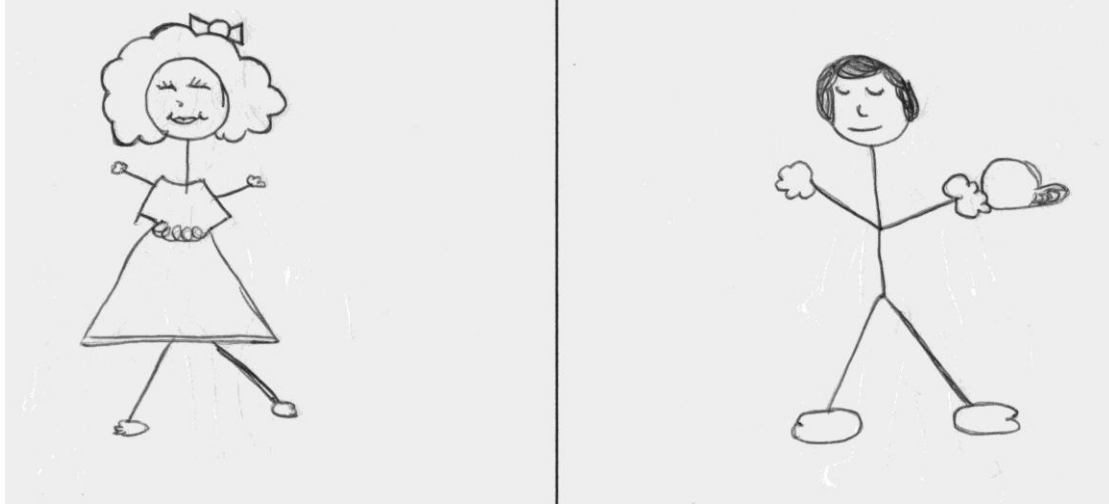
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Figure 5: Clothing and Accessories Example 2

Figure 5 also demonstrates the use of social indicators, such as clothing and accessories, to distinguish between ideal female and male bodies. Like the drawings in Figure 2, the bodies in Figure 5 are stick figures. Here, however, gender-specific clothing and accessories are the primary indicators of gender. The female body is highly accessorized, while the male body has no clothes and only a baseball cap. The female's dress, the bow on her hair, her full lips and pronounced eyelashes differentiate her from the ideal male who is depicted as neutral. Again, we observe the use of a "standard male" body from which the female body is derived.

Another significant aspect of Figure 5 that is representative of many others in the sample is gender differences in being clothed. Here, the male body is naked while the female body is clothed. Such images conform to notions that women's bodies must be concealed or controlled while men's bodies have nothing to hide (Bordo 1993).

Some participants elaborated on their drawings with comments on specific clothing and/or accessories to further distinguish between female and male ideal bodies. The most common written comments in this category focused on hair and grooming specifications. Some examples for female bodies were: "long hair," "shoulder-length hair," "straight hair," "thick hair," "blonde hair" and "shaved legs." For male bodies, some examples of written comments were: "short hair," "dark hair" and "clean-cut or trimmed facial hair." These markers illustrate that gender-specific, social characteristics are just as important as fixed, biological markers in defining and constructing gendered ideal body types for some participants.

Some participants also used race-specific adjectives. Descriptives such as "blonde" and "straight hair" imply that the ideal body is white. This notion was further indicated by other labels such as "blue eyes," "green eyes" and "white." These ideals are consistent with popular media images in which ideal bodies are derived from a white standard (hooks 1992; Zones 2005).

Gender Roles

A few participants depicted gender roles as distinguishing factors between ideal female and male bodies. Although images in this category are numerically small (n=6),

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the social implications are important and therefore worthy of analysis. Most of these drawings characterize the ideal male body in workplace attire. Some examples include suits and ties, lab coat and briefcases. Conversely, only one of their female counterparts is depicted with a career indicator; the remaining drawings in this category depict women in non-work attire.
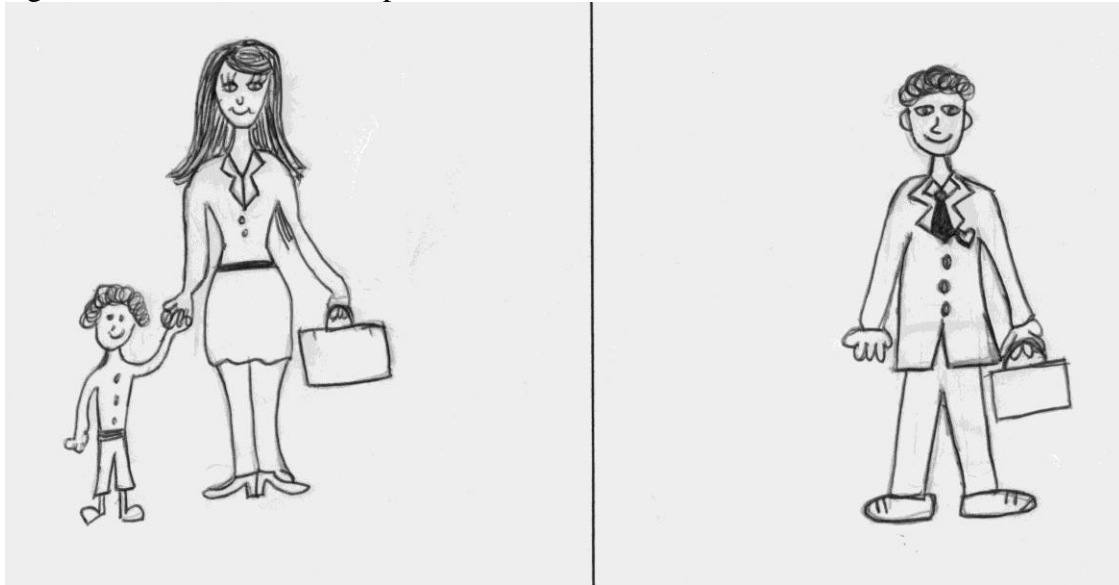
Figure 6: Gender Roles Example

Figure 6 demonstrates the use of gender roles to distinguish female and male ideal bodies. This particular drawing used career indicators for the ideal bodies of both sexes. Significantly, the male body is distinguished solely by his professional attire and briefcase. The female body, however, has both a career indicator (briefcase), along with indicators of her role as mother. This suggests that the ideal male body is defined by what he does outside the home to earn money, while the ideal female body is defined by her dual roles as career woman and mother. In addition, her professional attire is gender-specific, consisting of a fitted skirt suit with high heels, groomed long hair and pronounced eyelashes. This drawing seems to portray the ideal female body as attractive, professional and nurturing while the ideal male body is solely professional.

Some drawings in this category were accompanied by written comments. Male bodies were associated with money and hard work while female bodies were described as "smart and sophisticated."

Challenge

Three participants seemed to challenge our project of creating ideal female and male bodies. These participants constructed gender-neutral bodies to represent both the ideal female and ideal male bodies. One participant wrote, "I don't really think that there is an ideal body, but I do feel that society has more standards for females rather than males." Another wrote, "No matter what shape or size, the ideal woman is always happy." Such challenges are significant because they indicate a growing awareness among college students of issues of beauty standards and body ideals. They also suggest

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that some college students may have the ability to recognize and reject potentially unhealthy body standards.

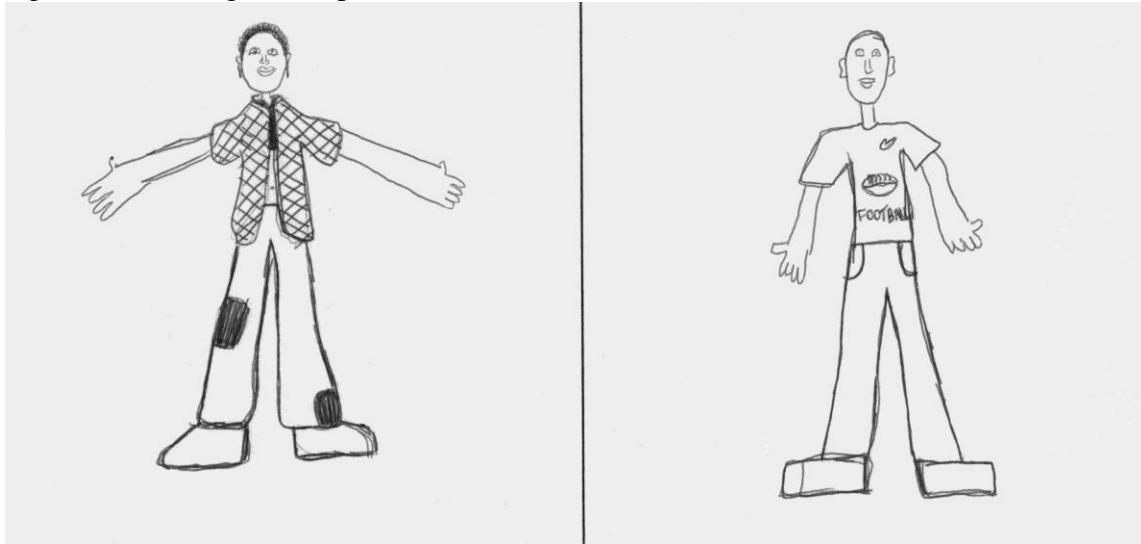Figure 7: Challenge Example

Figure 7 is one example of a drawing in which the participant challenged the highly differentiated ideal female and male bodies. This participant's drawing suggests that the differences between ideal female and male bodies are minimal. In fact, their actual bodies are almost identical. The ideal female body is clothed in gender-neutral apparel, with only two traditionally female details: earrings and a bare midriff. The male body is distinguished only by the football theme of his shirt and his slightly shorter hair. This drawing rejects the long hair, restrictive clothing and large breasts that are prevalent both in other participants' drawings and in media images. Finally, the participant's drawing suggests that the ideal female body is one that stands in a position of security and power, as indicated by her bold stance.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper analyzed college students' drawings of ideal female and male bodies. Our findings indicate that participants differentiated female and male bodies through differences in body shape and size, clothing and accessories, and gender roles. A few participants seemed to challenge gendered body ideals by providing drawings of male and female bodies that were nearly identical, or by writing narratives that reject the principle of ideal bodies. This project differs from previous research on body ideals in that we allowed participants to create their own images instead of selecting from images provided by the researchers (Ayala, Mickens, Galindo and Elder 2007; Fallon and Rozin 1985; Forbes et al. 2001; Lynch and Zellner 1999; Nollen et al. 2006; Rozin and Fallon 1988; Silberstein et al. 1988).

Allowing for creativity among participants yielded some expected and some unexpected results. Based on previous research and our own exposure to media ideals, we expected participants would distinguish ideal female and male bodies based on shape and size. Thus, depictions of ideal female bodies with large breasts and small waists, and

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male bodies with broad shoulders and large muscles were not surprising. We were also not surprised that many participants drew ideal male bodies taller and larger than ideal female bodies. As Crawley and colleagues (2008) point out, the more we are exposed to body ideals that portray one sex as different from the other in terms of size and shape, the more we come to expect these differences and view them as natural. These distinctions are also consistent with gendered body ideals reported by other researchers (Bordo 1999; Cohn and Adler 1992; Furnham, Dias and McClelland 1998; Harrison 2003; Labre 2002; Markulo 1995; Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein and Striegal-Moore 1986; Petrie et al. 1996).

We were surprised, however, at *how much* taller and larger many of the male bodies were depicted in comparison to the female bodies. Young's (2005) theory of female embodiment may provide a framework for interpreting these differences. Young argues that women and girls move within a much more constricted space than men and boys. As young girls learn socially expected ways of performing femininity, they learn to restrict their bodily movement so as to inhabit less space than boys. Such gender differences can be seen in everyday activities such as sitting, standing and walking, and in movements used in sport such as running, swinging and throwing. The result of such differences in bodily movement is that the female body appears much smaller and weaker compared to the male body. The drawings analyzed in the current study seem to portray exaggerated representations of gender differences in the use of space. The male bodies depicted here inhabit an enormous amount of space compared to the female bodies. These vast differences in space also suggest differences in power and agency attributed to the gendered bodies. The large male body that inhabits a great amount of space appears to hold much more power than the small, unassuming female body.

We were also surprised by the use of gendered clothing, accessories and activities to differentiate ideal male from ideal female bodies. Based on previous research on body ideals, we expected gender differences to be primarily in the realms of body shape and size. Depictions of clothing and accessories as integral to creating ideal female and male bodies demonstrate the importance of decorating the body in ways that are gendered. Judith Butler's (1993, 1996) analysis is useful here in interpreting the significance of clothing and accessories. Butler conceptualizes gender as a performance, arguing that gender is something individuals *do*, not something individuals *are*. Hence, individuals perform their gender when they wear gendered clothing and accessories and participate in gendered activities. This also supports the gender box structure set forth by Crawley and colleagues (2008), whereby gender display is expected to coincide with a particular sexed body. In the current study, the use of clothing and accessories suggest that gender performance is as important for achieving an ideal body as physical size and shape. This finding differs from previous research on ideal bodies, in which the drawings provided to participants are naked (Ayala, Mickens, Galindo and Elder 2007; Fallon and Rozin 1985; Forbes et al. 2001; Lynch and Zellner 1999; Nollen et al. 2006; Rozin and Fallon 1988; Silberstein et al. 1988).

We were also encouraged by the finding that some participants seemed to challenge the notion of body ideals. This finding suggests that some college students are trying to move beyond strict cultural ideals for gendered bodies. Crawley et al. (2008) point out that gendered bodies are not merely accepted and reproduced but also resisted through both individual and collective action. One form of gender resistance is through everyday disruptions, which the authors define as "intentional practices on a day-to-day

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basis to attempt to change gendered messages or show the gender box structure to be false" (Crawley et al. 2008: 204). The participants in the current study engaged in everyday disruptions of gendered body ideals through written comments that reject the notions altogether and through depictions of gendered bodies that contained elements typically associated with the other gender. The latter exemplifies Butler's (1990, 1993) conceptualization of gender subversion – the idea that individuals can challenge gender constructs by "doing" gender differently. This finding was only made possible by our open-ended format.

While we expected to see ideal male bodies portrayed differently from ideal female bodies, our findings regarding age and race were not expected. In hindsight, given that our sample was comprised of college students, it should not have been too surprising that participants depicted bodies similar to their own age as the ideal. At the same time, it is unclear whether the age specifications are more a preference for one's own age group or a representation of our cultural association of beauty with youth (Bordo 1993; Wolf 1992; Zones 2005). Future research with differently aged samples could shed light on this issue. The finding that some participants suggested – either covertly or overtly – that the ideal body is white is also significant. This finding supports previous associations of whiteness with beauty and this association as a central component of racism and racial discrimination (hooks 1992; Zones 2005). However, it is unknown in the current study whether it was white or minority students who defined the ideal bodies as white. Future research that compares images by race of the participant would be necessary to determine this. Brief follow up interviews could also be conducted to ask participants to explain the choices they made in their drawings. Such projects are fruitful not only to expand our understanding of body ideals, but also gender and race inequalities.

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