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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

BECOMING BODIES: HOW PREADOLESCENT GIRLS CONSUME AND PRODUCE MEDIA IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICA

This study investigates preadolescent girls' interpretations of images of and messages about women's bodies presented in both traditional and online media in the American cultural context. Using qualitative methods including in-depth interviews, email diaries, and digital photo collages, this study gives voice to girls aged nine to eleven from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds so that they might tell their stories about interacting with media that is relevant to their relationships with their bodies. Employing objectification theory as well as concepts from the cultural studies tradition, the findings suggest that the process of becoming a female body in the 21st-century American media environment is far more complex than a simple linear, cause-effect equation can express. Differences among girls in terms of media use, degree of media criticism, age, and interpersonal discursive environments moderate their relationships to mediated imagery and to their bodies. The findings also describe the mediated bodily ideal that is most relevant to preadolescent girls, the celebrity girls who embody this ideal, the ways in which girls experience self-objectification and body surveillance, and the nature of girls' conversations with friends and family members about body-related topics. The study concludes by providing recommendations to concerned researchers, educators, and parents.

KEYWORDS: Girls' Studies, Objectification Theory, New Media, Body Dissatisfaction, Qualitative Research Methods
Multimedia Elements Used: JPEG (.jpg)

Margaret Louise McGladrey

April 28, 2011

BECOMING BODIES:
HOW PREADOLESCENT GIRLS CONSUME AND PRODUCE MEDIA
IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICA

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April 28, 2011

THESIS

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2011

BECOMING BODIES:
HOW PREADOLESCENT GIRLS CONSUME AND PRODUCE MEDIA
IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICA

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts in the
College of Communications and Information Studies
at the University of Kentucky

By Margaret Louise McGladrey

Lexington, Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky

2011

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*To the girls who participated in this study, for sharing their stories and giving me hope for the future of
American girlhood*

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate girls' reception of mediated images of and messages about women's bodies presented in both traditional and online media in the American cultural context. If interactions with mediated representations of women's bodies serve as one of girls' first experiences of objectification (as per objectification theory defined later in this proposal), then it is critical for researchers, parents, and educators to understand the ways in which girls' interpretations and responses to these images and messages influence their development into adolescence and adulthood. This study aspires to give voice to preadolescent American girls from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds so that they might tell their stories about interacting with media that is relevant to their relationships with their bodies and thereby talk back to these media.

Discussion of the Problem

The desire for a perfectly thin body is so prevalent among American women and girls that it has been called a "normative discontent" (Rodin et al., 1985). From cosmetic surgeons and fitness gurus to advertising agencies and diet product designers, the merchants of the "body project" industry exploit body-related insecurities by manufacturing a never-ending drive for female consumers to purchase their wares in the pursuit an unattainable ideal of digitally manipulated perfection (Hesse-Biber, Levy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006; Lamb & Brown, 2006). And their efforts seem to work very successfully: a March 2006 online survey by Girls Inc. contacted 1,059 girls in grades 3 through 12, of whom 60 percent agreed with the statement that the most popular girls at school are very thin, and 7 in 10 girls reported being concerned about their appearance, specifically about how they look and their weight (Girls Inc., 2006). An online survey of 1,000 girls aged between thirteen and seventeen for the Girl Scouts of the USA found that nearly 90 percent of the girls surveyed said the

fashion industry (89 percent) and/or the media (88 percent) place a lot of pressure on them to be thin; three out of four girls said that fashion is “really important” to them (Ackley, 2010). Truby and Paxton (2002) found that only 42 percent of seven- to twelve-year-old girls expressed satisfaction with their bodies. Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006a) found that by the age of six, girls have already begun to desire thinner figures as the result of both peer and media influences. Dohnt and Tiggemann’s (2006b) prospective study suggests that girls as young as seven years old begin to internalize messages from the media about their bodies. Harriger et al. (2010) used a game-piece choice methodology with toddlers and found that three-year-old American girls display a preference for a “thin” over a “fat” game piece. Young girls are exposed to an unending barrage of media messages that prey upon their insecurities about their bodies to sell products such as clothes, makeup, and toys as well as condition these girls to become future consumers of cosmetic surgery procedures, diet and weight-loss products, and fitness programs (APA Task Force, 2007; Lamb & Brown, 2006). Russ (2008) observed that media discourses amplify and retrench body dissatisfaction discourses encountered on the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. Although the focus of this study is on cultural discourses of body dissatisfaction and self-objectification manifest in the media and how girls interpret them, it is essential to note the interrelationships between intrapersonal, interpersonal, and media/cultural discourses and their collective effectiveness in normalizing body dissatisfaction as a fact of life for American women and girls.

Girls’ coping mechanisms for dealing with these body-related pressures are diverse but almost universally self-destructive. Rates of depression markedly increase during adolescence, with twice as many girls displaying depressive symptoms as boys by the age of fifteen (Hankin et al., 1998). Psychological meta-analyses have shown that many more girls are plagued with low self-esteem than boys (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). In a

recent clinical report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (Rosen and the Committee on Adolescence, 2010), it is estimated that 0.5 percent of adolescent girls in the U.S. have anorexia nervosa, and 1 to 2 percent meet criteria for bulimia nervosa; females represent more than 90 percent of all cases of eating disorders. Hospitalizations for eating disorders in children under twelve years of age increased by 119 percent between 1999 and 2006 (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2009). A study of nationally representative data on more than 10,000 teens aged thirteen to eighteen by researchers from the National Institutes of Mental Health found that more than half a million U.S. teens have had an eating disorder but few have sought treatment for the problem (Swanson et al., 2011). Swanson et al. (2011) also found that more than half the teens affected by eating disorders have suffered from depression, anxiety, or some other mental disorder. Studies with racially and ethnically diverse samples of adolescent girls indicate that self-objectification is uniquely connected to body shame, depressive symptoms, eating disorder symptoms, and lower self-esteem after controlling for demographic factors (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003; Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006).

These signs of girls adopting unhealthy attitudes toward their bodies and disordered eating behaviors ever-earlier in their development are a problem of concern, especially given the ubiquity of mass media messages in children's early development and adolescence. Girls between the ages of eight and eighteen spend more than 10 hours a day using media, including more than four hours with television content delivered in a variety of formats and almost 1.5 hours on the Internet (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Research suggests that approximately 40 percent of three-month old children and about 90 percent of children aged 24 months and younger regularly watch television, DVDs, or videos (Zimmerman, Christakis, & Meltzoff, 2007). While 60 percent of teenagers spend on average 20 hours per

week in front of television and computer screens, a third spend closer to 40 hours per week, and about 7 percent are exposed to more than 50 hours of “screen-time” per week (Barnett et al., 2008). Empirical studies of the topic make it increasingly difficult to deny the link between media exposure and negative psychological consequences in female populations. An ongoing meta-analysis of cross-sectional and longitudinal survey research has confirmed that greater amounts of exposure to magazines and television are associated with higher levels of self-reported disordered eating behaviors (Murnen et al., 2007). A meta-analysis of 77 psychological studies demonstrated that media use is directly linked to women’s body dissatisfaction, internalization of the thin ideal, and disordered eating attitudes and beliefs (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008).

Girls’ Media Environment

The quality as well as the quantity of the media to which young girls are exposed is particularly troublesome for researchers interested in the effects of media use on girls’ body image and self-conceptions. In what cultural studies scholars like Rosalind Gill (2007) and Angela McRobbie (2004) describe as the current postfeminist media environment, every facet of a woman’s presentation and behavior is subject to improvement. Postfeminism assumes that feminism’s goal of eliminating sexism has been largely achieved and therefore, feminism as a political movement is no longer needed. Gill’s (2007) conceptualization of the postfeminist media environment is characterized by an array of interlocking thematic elements of film, television, online media, music, and advertising content: femininity as a bodily property; the sexualization of culture; self-objectification; individualism, choice, and “empowerment”; self-surveillance and discipline; the “makeover takeover” of media content; the reassertion of sexual difference between men and women; and the ironic presentation of overtly sexist sentiments. According to Gill (2007), “something of the intensity and

extensiveness of the self-surveillance and discipline now normatively required of women can be seen in women's magazines in which bodily shape, size, muscle tone, attire, sexual practice, career, home, finances, etc. are rendered into 'problems' that necessitate ongoing and constant monitoring and labour" (p. 155). However, women depicted in these mediated representations must take care not to show the exertion this self-management requires and must maintain a display of "effortless perfection" (Duke University Women's Initiative, 2003).

Aspects of the self-objectifying nature of postfeminist media culture are manifest throughout the media studies and communication literature (Russ, 2008; Douglas, 1994). Although approximately 50 percent of women in the U.S. are overweight or obese, only 13 percent of female characters portrayed on television are overweight (Greenberg et al., 2003). Even though much of the literature treats upon the prevalence of stereotyped femininity in traditional mass media such as television and movies, these trends apply in new media contexts because the Internet primarily serves the function of distributing content from traditional media producers, in addition to the Internet's more glamorized role in facilitating the creation and distribution of new media content. Across both new and traditional media, consumers encounter the "curvaceously thin ideal" American woman who has a 36-inch bust, a 24-inch waist, and 36-inch hips and simultaneously wears a size 4 (hips), size 2 (waist), and a size 10 (bust) (Harrison, 2003). Harrison (2003) contends that this disproportionate standard prompts women to engage in extreme dieting to reduce the lower half of their bodies and pursue cosmetic surgery to increase the size of their busts. It is important to make a distinction between a simple conception of the "thin ideal," which prescribes only dieting and exercise practices in order to lose weight and is commonly associated with runway fashion models, and the more specific formulation of Harrison's

(2003) “curvaceously thin ideal,” which stipulates not only weight reduction but also breast enlargement techniques and is associated with more sexualized exemplars such as the Victoria’s Secret and Playboy models as well as women in children’s media content such as the Disney Princesses and Barbie.

The curvaceously thin ideal dominates representations of women in media content aimed at children and adolescents. A content analysis of more than 100 female characters appearing in 23 Walt Disney animated cartoons found that an association between attractiveness/thinness and goodness was present in each film produced over the 60-year period covered by the study (Rumble, Cash, & Nashville, 2000, as cited in Klein & Shiffman, 2006). Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, and Thompson’s (2004) content analysis of body image-related messages in 20 popular children’s books and 25 popular children’s videos found these children’s media included an average of 8.7 body image-related messages per video and 2.8 per book. A majority of the videos (72 percent) placed emphasis on physical attractiveness, and female physical attractiveness was associated with sociability, kindness, happiness, or success in 84 percent of the videos (Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, & Thompson, 2004). Compared with magazines targeted toward older adults, magazines targeted toward younger age groups are 1.65 times more likely to feature advertisements in which models are dressed sexually (Reichert, 2003). In addition, female models were 3.7 times more likely to be portrayed suggestively dressed, partially clad, or nude than were male models (Reichert, 2003).

These trends are particularly prevalent in magazines targeting teenage girls. A qualitative content analysis by Labre and Walsh-Childers (2003) of websites of teen magazines that are frequently read by preadolescent girls, such as the websites of *CosmoGIRL!*, *Teen People*, *Seventeen*, and *Teen* magazines, identified three major themes: beauty

is a requirement, beauty can only be achieved through the purchase of products, and girls need magazines' help to find the right products. Presenting their editorial voices as those of friends rather than of marketers, these websites deliver image-management injunctions and strategies to girls in private, personalized, and interactive settings that could facilitate powerful effects on girls' self-conceptions (Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003). Ballentine and Ogle's (2005) qualitative content analysis of body-related articles featured in *Seventeen* magazine between 1992 and 2003 revealed several important themes. First, *Seventeen* magazine content identified a narrow set of body characteristics – smooth skin, toned muscles, a tight, lean figure, a youthful appearance – as ideal and problematized bodies that deviated from this ideal. Additionally, *Seventeen* magazine content offered different tools to girls seeking to “deal with” body problems, including controlling the body through exercise disciplines and managing the body through the consumption of products (Ballentine & Ogle, 2005). The sexually objectifying nature of large swaths of girls' media environments combined with frequent exposure to these media messages at a very young age means that girls accumulate mediated objectifying experiences long before encountering sexual objectification in their real-life interpersonal exchanges (MacBeth, 2004).

CHAPTER TWO: OBJECTIFICATION THEORY

The sociocultural and cognitive theoretical approaches typically drawn upon by communication scholars to investigate media use and body image offer interesting and valid explanations for how girls come to internalize the thin-body ideal promoted in the media. However, the internalization of cultural standards of beauty as operationalized by psychological scales like the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire (Smolak, Levine, & Thompson, 2001) only measure cognitive and attitudinal variables, not the affective and behavioral patterns, resulting from media exposure. In addition to cognitive processes, theoretical approaches must consider the factor of objectified body consciousness, a construct that represents the translation of internalized beliefs about beauty and the body into specific, everyday thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. According to the report of the American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007), objectification theory combines elements of the sociocultural and cognitive theoretical approaches to most directly describe the process by which girls internalize the culture's objectifying messages (pp. 19-20).

Overview of Objectification Theory and Research

Psychologists Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts developed objectification theory in 1997 as a means of explaining the consequences of living in a social environment that constructs women's bodies as objects existing for the pleasure of the male gaze and as subject to constant comparison with other women's body-objects. The pervasiveness throughout mass-media and interpersonal contexts of treating women's bodies as objects conditions girls to view themselves through a critical observer's gaze in a phenomenon psychologists term "self-objectification." Because they anticipate that their bodies will be under nonstop evaluation, women and girls develop an ever-attentive self-

consciousness, called body surveillance by psychologists, that inculcates feelings of shame, self-loathing, and anxiety about their appearances. In turn, psychological researchers have demonstrated that these negative emotions can contribute to psychological disorders such as eating disorders and depression whose sufferers are primarily female (Frederickson & Noll, 1998; Grabe, Shibley Hyde, & Lindberg, 2007; Moradi, Dirks, & Matteson, 2005; Tiggemann & Boundy, 2008; Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004).

In the conceptual model developed by psychological researchers, the process through which a self-objectifying perspective takes hold begins with sexual objectification experiences. In a domino effect, sexually objectifying experiences promote body surveillance and the internalization of cultural standards of beauty, which in turn instill feelings of greater body shame, greater appearance anxiety, and lower awareness of internal body states that can lead to disordered eating and depressive symptoms (see model below from Moradi & Huang, 2008, p. 392):

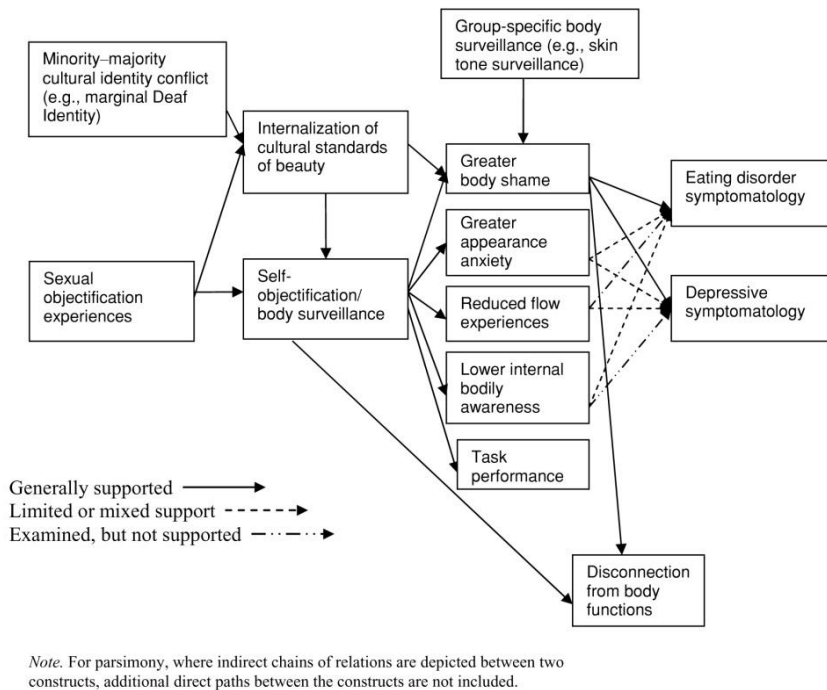


Figure 2.1. Objectification Theory Model.

Psychological research has identified several types of sexual objectification experiences, including body-critical interpersonal exchanges (Calogero, 2004; Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath, & Denchik, 2007) and exposure to sexually objectifying media (see review below). The sexually objectifying experience of interest to this project is exposure to sexually objectifying media, but the following review of objectification theory literature concerning young women will consider research that has studied media exposure as a sexually objectifying experience as well as preadolescent and adolescents' exhibition of self-objectifying attitudes, as very few studies have examined media exposure as a sexually objectifying experience for preadolescent populations.

Media Exposure as a Sexually Objectifying Experience

Research by psychologists and communication scholars has confirmed that media exposure can constitute a sexually objectifying experience for young women and girls. In a two-year longitudinal panel study of undergraduate college student participants, Aubrey (2006) found that women reported more exposure to objectifying television shows and magazines than men, and women reported more self-objectification and more body surveillance than men. Aubrey's (2006) findings indicated that exposure to sexually objectifying television shows was associated with an increase in viewers' definitions of their physical selves in terms of externally perceivable traits, such how the body appears, rather than internal traits, such as what it can do (p. 381). In addition to these kinds of self-objectifying responses to television shows and magazines, the actual text of women's magazines provides narratives and rationales that facilitate women's self-objectifying perspectives. A study by Kim and Ward (2004) examined the associations between 205 young women's use of women's magazines, both adult- and teen-focused, and sexual attitudes. The study found that women's motivations for reading magazines determined the

media's effect on the women's sexual attitudes; reading magazines for sex, beauty, and/or body advice was associated with a stronger endorsement of objectifying one's body.

In an experimental design exploring the effects of mediated imagery of women's bodies, Harper and Tiggemann (2008) found that participants viewing ads in the experimental conditions reported greater self-objectification, appearance anxiety, negative mood, and body dissatisfaction than participants who viewed the control ad. Aubrey, Henson, Hopper, and Smith (2009) tested images of female models shown with high levels of skin exposure as an operationalization of mediated sexual objectification experiences. Women exposed to images with high levels of skin exposure described themselves with a higher number of appearance-related statements compared to the control group. These studies comport with the growing body of evidence for "small but relatively consistent" short-term effects of media exposure on body-related outcomes among young women (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002, p. 11).

Objectification Theory's Applicability to Preadolescents and Adolescents

The propositions of objectification theory appear to hold true in preadolescent and adolescent populations as well as samples of adult and college women. An early study considering objectification theory's applicability to younger populations of women is Slater and Tiggemann's (2002) survey of girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen, one group of whom studied classical ballet and one group of whom did not. Although the data analysis found no difference between the two groups in self-objectification, the objectification theory model was supported for the total sample, as body shame and appearance anxiety variables partially mediated the relationship between self-objectification and disordered eating. In order to further test objectification theory's assumption that self-objectification develops in adolescence with pubertal maturation, psychological researchers developed a measure of

self-objectification attitudes and behaviors suitable for use with preadolescent and adolescent populations (Lindberg, Hyde, & McKinley, 2006). Lindberg and her colleagues modified the original objectified body consciousness (OBC) scale (McKinley & Hyde, 1996) designed for adults to an appropriate vocabulary level and sentence structure for preadolescent and early-adolescent children in order for researchers to track the development of OBC through adolescence. Lindberg, Hyde, and McKinley (2006) tested this scale in a survey of more than 300 fifth graders and found that girls reported significantly more body surveillance than did boys even at this young age, and among girls, pubertal development was strongly associated with body surveillance and body shame. Body shame in girls was associated with both current dieting and dieting within the past year (Lindberg, Hyde, & McKinley, 2006).

Grabe, Hyde, and Lindberg (2007) found that thirteen-year-old girls reported higher levels of body monitoring, shame, and rumination behaviors than their male counterparts, and that self-objectification and its ensuing emotions were already relevant to girls as young as eleven years old. Analysis of Tolman, Impett, Tracy, and Michael's (2006) results of a survey of girls found that strength of the regression coefficient predicting self-esteem from body objectification and other measures of internalization of femininity ideologies accounted for half of the variance in depression and more than two-thirds of the variance in self-esteem. Gordon (2008) surveyed 176 adolescent African-American girls (mean age of fifteen), and analysis of the resulting data indicated that both exposure to and identification with portrayals of sexually objectified African-American women in the media were correlated with participants' prioritization of appearance in their own lives. Knauss, Paxton, and Alsaker's (2008) survey of 819 boys and 791 girls aged fourteen to sixteen years measured the relationships between body shame and body surveillance (components of objectified body consciousness), internalization of the media body ideal, perceived pressure from media,

body mass index, and body dissatisfaction. As expected, Knauss, Paxton, and Alsaker's analysis found that girls had higher levels of body shame and body surveillance than boys. Slater and Tiggemann's (2010) survey of 382 boys and 322 girls ranging in age from twelve to sixteen years old measured levels of body surveillance, body shame, appearance anxiety, and disordered eating in the sample. Although the authors found that girls displayed higher levels of body surveillance, body shame, appearance anxiety, and disordered eating than did boys, the model proposed by objectification theory was largely supported for both girls and boys. The findings of these studies provide evidence that objectification theory explains the psychological processes that affect the lives of girls as well as older females.

Media Exposure as a Sexual Objectification Experience for Preadolescents

One of the very few recent projects that has taken up the APA Task Force's (2007) call for more research on girls' sexually objectifying experiences with the media using objectification theory is a recent study by Tiggemann and Miller (2010). This study examined the relationship between exposure to the Internet and body image in adolescent girls (of a mean age of 14.9 years old) and found that Internet exposure and magazine reading, but not television exposure, were correlated with greater internalization of the thin ideal, appearance comparison, weight dissatisfaction, and drive for thinness. A second study on preadolescent girls' objectification experiences with media that used objectification theory is Grabe and Hyde's (2009) work on the relationship between music television viewing and psychological consequences of self-objectification. Grabe and Hyde (2009) conducted a survey of 195 preadolescent girls of an average age of thirteen and considered exposure to music television specifically because of the genre's heavy reliance on the use of sexually objectified women as props (p. 2843). The data supported the authors' hypothesis that greater consumption of music television would be positively correlated with measures of self-objectification as well

as its proposed consequences, including lower body esteem, dieting patterns, negative psychological well-being, and lack of confidence in the traditionally male domain of mathematics. In this project, Grabe and Hyde demonstrated the connection between sexually objectifying media exposure and the consequences of self-objectification in the preadolescent population identified as crucial to investigate by the APA Task Force's report. The current project will continue pursuing this line of inquiry from a qualitative research perspective with a sample of preadolescent girls aged nine to eleven, a population whose self-objectifying attitudes and behaviors have not been well distinguished from those of adolescent girls in the psychology or communication literature (with the exception of Grabe & Hyde, 2009, and Tiggemann & Miller, 2010, both of which used quantitative research methods).

Key Research Questions

Review of the literature suggests that limited qualitative research has been conducted within or outside the communication discipline in the objectification theoretical framework to consider how media exposure represents a sexually objectifying experience for preadolescent girls. Given that most prior research in the area of the effects of sexual objectifying media has focused almost exclusively on adult women and teenagers, Grabe and Hyde (2009) assert that it is imperative that researchers investigate young girls' processes of internalizing body-related messages from the media (p. 2844). The APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007) calls for further study of the circumstances and factors, particularly media consumption, that contribute to the sexualization of girls (p. 42). Psychologist Sharon Lamb (2009) describes a desperate need for original research on the ways in which the media's objectification of girls' bodies affects young female audiences. Jennifer Stevens Aubrey of the University of Missouri, a leading communication researcher

who employs objectification theory in her work (see Aubrey, 2006; Aubrey, Henson, Hopper, & Smith, 2009), stated that this study will fill an important gap in the objectification theory literature (J. Aubrey, personal communication, March 1, 2010).

In consideration of this research need, the key research questions for this study involve inquiry into the ways that girls between the ages of nine and eleven from diverse backgrounds experience sexual objectification through their interaction with media content, particularly online media such as social networking sites, celebrity-oriented websites, and YouTube videos. Although the objectification theoretical model as a whole has been well validated through the studies reviewed above and other work published in psychological journals such as *Psychology of Women Quarterly* and *Sex Roles*, the mechanism by which exposure to objectifying media as a sexual objectification experience (the first step in the objectification theory model) operates to influence subsequent constructs (internalization of the thin ideal, self-objectification, and body surveillance) has not been definitively identified. Therefore, toward the goal of exploring girls' objectification experiences with the media, this study must settle upon an appropriate conceptualization of the ways in which media images affect girls' relationships to their bodies.

Occasionally employing objectification theory (as in Aubrey, Henson, Hopper, & Smith, 2009) but typically following a more general sociocultural models, previous communication and psychological research has drawn upon a variety of theories to explain how media images come to influence women and girls' feelings about their bodies: social comparison theory (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004; Botta, 2000; Jung & Peterson, 2007; Durkin & Paxton, 2002); cultivation theory (Harrison, 2003; Schooler, 2008); media priming (Aubrey, Henson, Hopper, & Smith, 2009); self-discrepancy theory (Harrison, 2001); and appearance schemas (Sinton & Birch, 2006). Each of these conceptualizations suffers from a

critical shortcoming: reliance upon a causal, linear model of subject-object relations that assumes more or less identical decoding strategies on the part of consumers of media texts. In these explanations of media effects, variation in decoding strategies is typically explained by differences in measurable behavioral or attitudinal constructs (McDonald, 2004). However, media scholars interested in reception analysis contend that variations in decoding techniques cannot be so easily predicted by simple differences in audience members' psychological characteristics. As notably theorized by Stuart Hall (2001), although media producers may encode texts with "preferred" or "dominant" interpretations, media consumers may resist these inscribed readings by decoding media messages through oppositional readings:

It is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a *globally* contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference (Hall, 2001, p. 175).

Following Hall's logic, a reader could interpret mediated imagery and messages along a continuum of criticism, from accepting the preferred reading as presented to radically reinterpreting the message according to her own conceptual framework. This continuum of criticism complicates the predictive power of simple degree-of-exposure + levels of relevant psychological constructs = severity-of-effects theories, such as cultivation or social comparison.

In addition to the limitations posed by models that assume linear, causal relationships between objects (media texts) and subjects (readers) who interpret media texts in the same way, these explanations of the relationship between the media and female viewers' body image presume that effects flow in one direction from object to subject, with externally produced images and messages exerting influence over internal processes of self-body relations. This explanation leaves no room for the possibility that bodies and images

are mutually constituted; that is, mediated images and messages of women's bodies derive meaning from subjects' interpretations of them, and women and girls come to know their own bodies through their reflections in images. Just as "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 267), bodies are not born, but rather become through their interactions with images. Drawing upon Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of the body-as-process, feminist media scholar Rebecca Coleman (2008) argues, "A body is not a human subject who has relations *with* images, but rather a body *is* the relation between what conventional philosophy has called a human subject and images" (p. 168). One's own body cannot be seen in its totality while one inhabits it; humans require images as referents to how their bodies actually appear from the outside. Similarly, the bodies of others cannot be felt or experienced from within, but only seen from an external vantage point. Therefore, the image is central to a woman's conceptualization of her own body and to her encounters with others' bodies. It is not the image or the body in isolation or in linear relation, then, but the dialogic interaction between the image and the body that forms a woman's body consciousness, and this body-image relationship is constantly in the process of transforming, morphing, and evolving within particular contexts of time and space.

Research employing a "becoming of bodies" theoretical perspective should consider broader questions of the processes by which human bodies and media images interact than those typically posed by psychological and communication researchers. That is, questions of continual perceptual processing are best addressed using qualitative methodologies that facilitate the emergence of subject-specific insights that cannot be captured by pre-fabricated survey questions designed to measure static attitudinal and behavioral constructs. In her analysis of the audience reception literature, Willett (2008) identifies two modes of audience engagement with media: a detached, critical analysis that deconstructs media texts and their

formulas and a personal relationship with media texts that involves identification with characters and narratives. According to Willett (2008), “these studies point to a need to consider multiple ways people engage with media texts as well as the importance of doing qualitative audience research” (p. 424). Following this line of reasoning, researchers must strive to recognize the differing modes in which audiences engage with media imagery as loci of connection between human bodies and mediated representations of them. As Coleman (2008) asserts, “if relations with images constitute bodies, a focus of feminist research should be on how bodies are experienced through images and on how these experiences limit or extend the becoming of bodies” (p. 164). Accordingly, the central issues for feminist researchers interested in the topic of body image should revolve around explorations of the quality of women and girls’ knowledge, understandings, and experiences of their bodies produced through relations with images. Within the context of this study, Coleman’s theorizing prompts inquiries into how girls understand the body practices and beautification technologies whose end results are captured by media images and the extent to which girls experience those processes as mandates for the production of their own body-images.

Important research questions to explore in this project include:

- What sources of new and traditional media do girls actually use and how do they use them?
- What do girls consider to be the image of the ideal female body? Which images of the ideal female body are most influential in girls’ development of a self-objectifying perspective and adoption of beauty/body maintenance practices, such as dieting and consuming beauty products and clothes?

- What are the perceived benefits they associate with attaining the “perfect body” and the risks and punishments they anticipate to result from failing to achieve the physical ideal promoted in mediated imagery?
- Who do girls perceive the audiences for their body projects to be? In other words, who are they trying to please with their projects of body- and self-improvement: themselves, other people in their lives, or some abstract notion of what men/schools/employers/society at large will expect of them?
- How do girls talk about their feelings about their bodies and women/girls in the media with their families and friends?
- Are demographic variables (e.g., race, age, socioeconomic status, etc.) correlated with the extent to which girls self-objectify, monitor their appearances, and struggle with eating disturbances?

CHAPTER THREE: MEDIA DISCOURSES AND GIRLS' CULTURE

Considering the research questions raised by this review of objectification theory, it is important to review the literature treating upon the relationship between media exposure and girls' body image in order to understand the ways in which these questions have been explored by researchers from other disciplinary perspectives. Focusing specifically on media exposure and girls' body image rather than on other aspects of girls' relationships to their mediated environments, the following literature review will reflect upon how other scholars have theorized girls' media contexts as sites at which their experiences of their bodies have been essentialized, commodified, and objectified. First, this review will trace the emergence of the broader field of Girls' Studies within the communication and psychology disciplines before examining specific trends in Girls' Studies research that highlight the commodification of Girl Power rhetoric. Next, the review will consider how scholars have conceptualized the philosophical, political, economic, and sociocultural imperatives underlying the prominence of the curvaceously thin ideal described previously. Finally, this review will discuss how scholars understand girls' techniques for negotiating their relationships to the curvaceously thin ideal in the new media environment. The key theme common to all three of these threads running through the literature is their conclusion that commercial media propagates a dichotomy between girls' bodies and their inner selves, in which her body constitutes an object for a girl to monitor, control, and fashion to her best advantage. The subject-object relationship between girls' minds and bodies promulgated by media discourse seems to be a likely source of the very kinds of sexual objectification experiences that psychological researchers have found exposure to media promoting the curvaceously thin ideal to constitute.

Tracing Girls' Studies

Prior to the work of the foremothers of Girls' Studies – Carol Gilligan in psychology, who published *In a different voice* in 1982, and Angela McRobbie in cultural studies, who began her work on girls' cultures in the 1970s – studies of youth culture in the tradition of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (e.g., Paul Willis and Dick Hebdige) had focused primarily upon boys' subcultures (Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). Gilligan's central thesis (1982) was that young girls speak "in a different voice" than do their male counterparts that is often silenced by a patriarchal culture, leading girls to feel "confident at eleven, confused at sixteen." Unlike Gilligan, who focused exclusively on the results of experimental research in psychology, McRobbie highlighted the differences between boys' subcultures (which her colleagues at the Birmingham School had studied exclusively prior to her work) and girls' distinct ways of incorporating popular culture texts as shared interests into their lived experiences, as in her widely cited analysis of the wildly successful British teen girl magazine *Jackie* (which although written in the 1970s was finally published in 1991).

In response to Gilligan and McRobbie's work revealing a silencing of girls' voices, a flood of what Joan Brumberg (2000) called "voice books" were published in the 1990s that purported to allow adults to listen in on the inner lives of girls and adolescents, such as *Voices of a generation: Teenage girls report about their lives today* by Pamela Haag, *Fat talk: What girls and their parents say about dieting* by Mimi Nichter, *Ophelia speaks: Adolescent girls write about their search for self* by Sara Shandler, and *Adios, Barbie: Young women write back about body image and identity* by Ophira Edut. Accompanying these "voice books," the first wave of Girls' Studies in the 1990s (e.g., *Reviving Ophelia* in 1994 by psychologist Mary Pipher) focused on documenting the quality of the mass-produced cultural artifacts consumed by girls,

prompting public anxiety and a cultural fascination with the “girl crises” of school performance, self-esteem, body image, and bullying, all of which were deemed to necessitate adult intervention and protection (Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). More recently, Girls’ Studies have moved away from the discourse of “girls in crisis” to more culturally oriented explorations of girls’ experiences of girlhood as a distinct period of identity formation. Mazzarella and Pecora (2007, p. 106) consider this current wave of Girls’ Studies work to consist of three sub-areas: analyses that investigate mediated representations of the agency of powerful girls (i.e, Girl Power discourses), reception studies that elicit the voices of girls themselves to understand how they negotiate the so-called “girl crises,” and work on girls as active producers of culture in the new media environment of blogs, social networking, web publishing, and other Internet-based activities.

Research in the first of these three sub-areas has analyzed two competing discourses that signify the meaning of post-modern girlhood: “Girl Power” and “Reviving Ophelia,” both of which surfaced in the early 1990s (Gonick, 2006). The “Girl Power” discourse identified by Gonick (2006) imagines a “Riot Grrrl” unencumbered by the constraints of femininity to assert her individuality and right to self-determination. Although the Girl Power discourse emerged from the Riot Grrrl punk movement of the 1990s that rejected consumption, Riordan (2001) argues that the positive sentiment espoused by the Riot Grrrls (that American culture should value girls and girl activities in order to enhance girls’ self-esteem) was quickly appropriated by vendors of commercial producers of commercial music (The Spice Girls), television (Buffy the Vampire Slayer), and Internet sites (gURL sites). Riordan (2001) suggests that examining these commodified Girl Power media texts allows scholars to identify the social relations that texts are designed to reproduce, as the “use value” of the concept (e.g., Girl Power) is transformed into an “exchange value” that

illustrates acceptable forms of Girl Power (i.e., power through sexualization and command of the male gaze) and thereby promotes individual consumption rather than collective social change. The “Reviving Ophelia” discourse presents girls as “vulnerable, passive, voiceless, and fragile” (Gonick, 2006, p. 2). Although the Reviving Ophelia discourse is an old trope within Western societies (as evidenced in the panic surrounding hysteria in the Victorian era), psychologist Mary Pipher (1994) rearticulated the discourse for modern sensibilities, contending that adolescent girls are coerced by a “girl-hostile culture” into defining themselves in terms of what they can do to please others rather than in terms of who they truly want to be.

While on the surface these two discourses appear to be contradictory, Gonick (2006) argues that in fact they represent two different paths available to girls for navigating the neoliberal sociopolitical order. In the neoliberal context, it is not structural or sociopolitical constraints but “good choices, effort, and ambition alone are responsible for success that has come to separate the can-dos from the at-risks” (Harris, 2004, p. 16). The Girl Power discourse constructs the idealized form of the self-determining, consumptively constituted female neoliberal subject; the Reviving Ophelia discourse interpellates a disordered girl-subject unsuccessful in her attempts at individuated autonomy who collapses into anxiety and must be saved via therapeutic intervention. Gonick (2006) argues that both sides of this binary of neoliberal female subjectivity require the extraction of the individual from the structural constraints imposed upon her by gendered, classed, and racial inequalities, making the individual girl responsible for her own successes and failures. Similarly, Riordan (2001) concludes that commodified pro-girl rhetoric empowers women and girls only at the individual level of consumption, obscuring and making irrelevant the structural forces

implicated in women's inequality and preventing women and girls from collectively organizing toward the goal of challenging these forces.

An important "technology of self" for girls' neoliberal subjectivities is the fashioning of a beautiful appearance and appropriately slender body. In the commodified Girl Power rhetoric of media texts (music, music videos, magazine covers, television appearances, etc.) generated by the Spice Girls, Riordan (2001) contends that "the only way for girls to achieve power is by using one's sexuality and looks" (p. 290). In their study designed to elicit preadolescent boys' and girls' constructions of gender relations, masculine/feminine desires, and sexuality using a story from the Archie comic book series as a prompt, Moffatt and Norton (2008) found that the Girl Power discourse constitutes a mixed message for preadolescents, blending feminist messages that validate girls' experiences with patriarchal attitudes that girls can be independent as long as they prioritize heterosexual relationships and understand the importance of being attractive to boys in gaining that power. Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz's (2009) book-length study interviewing teenage girls about power, agency, and girlhood included an in-depth investigation of the concept of popularity, a key determinant of agency and self-worth in girls' social lives (p. 83). The authors' definition of popularity based on their findings bears repeating in full:

As used by the girls in our study, "Popular" signals membership in the prized – and well-guarded – clique of an idealized girlhood that meets the standards of "emphasized femininity." Across different school contexts, only girls who were pretty, not fat, attractive, and attracted to boys could ever hope to gain membership in the Popular clique. As a "universalized" standard, it cut across class and racialized divisions (2009, p. 94).

According to their participants, popular girls gain social currency by embodying an idealized femininity that commands the attention of boys and compels jockeying for position in the social hierarchy with other girls; virtually every participant's description of popular girls' appearances echoed Mia's explanation: "They're tall, skinny. Yeah, they tend to wear a lot of

like low-slung jeans, tank-tops that bare their belly a lot...Not all of them are blond, but [they] all have long hair” (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009, p. 86). Unsurprisingly, this description of the popular girl at school mirrors the image of the curvaceously thin woman manifest throughout the media. And crucially, this Girl-Powered appearance must be self-regulated and self-disciplined through a costly regimen of beauty products, making the girl embodying this appearance the ideal neoliberal subject (Gill, 2007, p. 164).

Why the Curvaceously Thin Ideal?

The preceding discussion of the cultural discourses of girlhood made accessible to young girls demonstrates the centrality of the image of the curvaceously thin woman in girls’ assessment of their agency, self-worth, and autonomy. Those subscribing to an evolutionary biology perspective might prefer to justify the prevalence of the curvaceously thin ideal in the American cultural consciousness simply as a reproductive strategy, arguing that the hourglass figure indicates the fertility and health of a potential mate (e.g., Singh, 2006; Jasienska et al., 2004). Although the biological motivations that privilege the curvaceously thin ideal may partially explain its attractive power, reproductive rationales alone cannot account for the omnipresence of this archetype throughout mediated consumer culture. In an essay from her 1993 collection entitled *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*, philosopher Susan Bordo argues that the extreme drive for thinness manifest in anorexia nervosa, far from being an aberration or extreme pathology, typifies the anxieties and distresses of American culture and offers a crystallized form of much that is wrong with it. Bordo (1993) draws upon Foucault’s theorizing about the body as site of cultural production where important messages about a culture’s values and imperatives are writ large:

Cultural practices, far from exerting their power against spontaneous needs, “basic” pleasures or instincts, or “fundamental” structures of body experience, are already and always inscribed, as Foucault has emphasized, “on our bodies and their

materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasures.” Our bodies, no less than anything else that is human, are constituted by culture (p. 142).

On the extreme end of the continuum of body dissatisfaction, the anorexic exemplifies anxieties specific to the current cultural moment that girls grapple with on a daily basis: the Cartesian dualism privileging the mind’s scheming over the body’s feelings, the mandate to maintain perfect control of one’s life, and the injunction to tame her vulnerable emotions and voracious female appetites with the characteristically masculine discipline of her mind in order to succeed in school and work contexts (Bordo, 1993). According to Bordo, “Anxiety over women’s uncontrollable hungers appears to peak, as well, during periods when women are becoming independent and are asserting themselves politically and socially” (1993, p. 161), such as the current, allegedly post-feminist era. These pandemics of cultural anxiety take clear aim at true female empowerment and require every woman and girl to negotiate a relationship to her body that demarcates her stance toward the curvaceously thin ideal.

In her updated preface to the 10th edition of her *Unbearable Weight* essay collection, Bordo (2003) applies this theorizing about the cultural meaning of the thin ideal to the decidedly neoliberal context in which she now finds herself and her young daughter, arguing that these neoliberal times are characterized by an “empire of images,” a hegemony of digitally perfected images of women’s bodies that reigns supreme over 21st-century American culture. Within the empire of images, Bordo (2003, p. B6) writes, citizens make “contact, everywhere, no big deal. Like water in a goldfish bowl, barely noticeable by its inhabitants. Or noticed, but dismissed: ‘eye candy’ – a harmless indulgence. They go down so easily, in and out, digested and forgotten. Just pictures. Or perhaps, more accurately, perceptual pedagogy: ‘How to Interpret Your Body 101.’” As Bordo hints at in the final sentence of this quote, the empire of images not only colonizes women and girls’ relationships to their bodies but also prescribes unambiguous norms of appearance that mandate a regimen of

beauty purchases to fill the coffers of the empire. Bordo (2003) asserts that the neoliberal discourses implicit in the beauty mandate perpetuate the mythology that beauty is available to all, despite the high toll of time and money required to attain the scarce commodity of the gaze's attention with body projects to achieve "to-be-looked-at femininity" (Weber, 2009, p. 124).

It is at this point that the psychologists' construct of self-objectification intersects with the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, or the training of citizens through informal cultural pedagogies such as commercial media to consider themselves in the third-person so that they might control, govern, and discipline themselves to relieve the government of the burden of doing so. Processes of internalizing the other's gaze are also intimately linked to the neoliberal economy as a means to normalize and provide instruction in the consumptive practices associated with beauty and body maintenance. Susan Douglas (1994) perfectly explains this self-body relationship as making women and girls "active subjects in control of their own images and passive objects judged by those same images" (p. 263). As with other elements of Girl Power discourse, beauty and body practices are by definition individualized and divert awareness from the social dynamics of self-body relations, in a "politics of distraction" that functions in perfect accord with neoliberalism's privatizing impulses. Naomi Wolf (1992) describes this form of beauty-based governmentality in terms of the ever-expanding gulf between one's actual physical form and the ideal; "ideal beauty is ideal because it does not exist: the action lies in the gap between desire and gratification... That space, in consumer culture, is a lucrative one" (p. 176). Feminist psychologists Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, and Zoino (2006) identify the American fast food industry, the diet and weight-loss industry, the fitness industry, and the cosmetic surgery industries as the direct beneficiaries of what they term the "mass-marketing" of eating disorders (pp. 213-214).

Although Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, and Zoino's list represents industries that take in billions of dollars in annual revenues, it excludes the ancillary beneficiaries of women's self-objectification, such as the cosmetics, tanning, clothing, accessories, and mediated imagery businesses that also profit from women and girls' insecurities about their appearances.

Before specifically examining young girls and adolescent women as market segments targeted for these products, it is helpful to consider Dallas Smythe's theory of the audience as a commodity (1977), in which the product that media producers manufacture and sell to advertisers is the attention and "eye balls" of their audiences, as measured by the audience share ratings of organizations like A.C. Nielsen. According to Smythe (1977), "the information, entertainment, and 'educational' material transmitted to the audience is an inducement (gift, bribe, or 'free lunch') to recruit potential members of the audience and to maintain their loyal attention" (p. 5, as cited in Bermejo, 2009, p. 136). Following Smythe's theory, media audiences must be viewed not merely as passive consumers, but rather as active agents in the competitive neoliberal marketplace of ideas, where audience members' captive consciousness have quantifiable market value as labor; "the work which audience members perform for the advertiser to whom they have been sold is to learn to buy particular 'brands' of consumer goods, and to spend their income accordingly. In short, they work to create the demand for advertised goods" (Smythe, 1997, p. 6, as cited in Bermejo, 2009, p. 137). From the perspective of audience as commodity, viewers are not only consumers but also consumed, by both the media producers who sell their attention to advertisers and by the advertisers who profit from audiences' socialization to their products and subsequent demand for those products.

As market segments for selling beauty, apparel, and other appearance-oriented products, young girls and adolescent women constitute a particularly appealing audience-as-

commodity. The four key developmental issues that affect adolescent and preadolescent girls' relationships to the curvaceously thin ideal portrayed in the media include body image, self-esteem, sexuality, and peer relationships (Merskin, 2005). The crucial questions arising for girls dealing with these issues include: "Do I look fat? Am I worthy? Does he want me? What will my other people think?" (Merskin, 2005, pp. 52-54). These are the very questions that advertisers targeting the Tween market seek to exploit; as Merskin (2005) explains, "At a time [in their development] characterized by intense self-consciousness and self-scrutiny, advertising that targets adolescent girls usually spotlights solutions to personal conflicts and challenges that are solvable by purchase of the right clothes, cosmetics, hair ornaments, and other beauty products" (p. 53). Because these developmental issues center on girls' management of their relationships with their bodies, girls' processes of negotiating their body image, self-esteem, sexuality, and peer relationships are ripe for exploitation by advertisers from the empire of images, and the recruitment of girls into this audience-as-commodity at a young age socializes them to be consumers of beauty and appearance-enhancing products for life.

Advertisers have taken advantage of preadolescent girls' self-consciousness and reliance on social cues in their processes of identity formation in order to manufacture a lucrative market segment: the "Tween." The market for preadolescents, or Tweens (aged eight to twelve), is worth \$335 billion a year, according to CEO of the girls' marketing firm Girls' Intelligence Agency, Laura Groppe (Leung, 2004). Cook and Kaiser (2004) trace the inception of the Tween consumer demographic from its emergence after World War Two to demonstrate how the Tween has been constructed as an ambiguous marketing and merchandising category (primarily imagined to include girls between the ages of nine and twelve who are White, middle-class and heterosexual) for marketing accessories, clothes,

make-up, and shoes. According to Cook and Kaiser (2004), marketers first identified the “subteen” market in the 1950s as the result of the increased social visibility of the teenage girl, who younger girls wanted to emulate. By the mid-1950s, retailers had begun elaborating the commercial persona of the subteen and her purchasing preferences, and by the late 1950s, the size of the target population had earned subteens the status of standard retail category (Cook & Kaiser, 2004). The move to “preteen” marketing in the 1970s was marked by increased age ambiguity and trickle-down influence from teenage fashions, and the 1980s saw this trend cohere into an explicitly sexualized femininity with the recognition of its exchange value through trends like form-fitting designer jeans (see Brooke Shields’s Calvin Klein ads). According to Cook and Kaiser (2004), Tweens emerged as a specific identity category all its own in the late 1980s and 1990s, which witnessed the advent of the “baby glossies” (*Teen Vogue*, *Cosmo Girl*, and *Elle Girl* magazines).

Cook and Kaiser (2004) introduce the fascinating concept of “anticipatory enculturation” to teenagerdom (p. 206) in order to describe the age ambiguity, forward-looking nature, and “in-betweenness” of the Tween market. The in-betweenness and age ambiguity result from “the tension between trying to meet girls’ ever-pressing demands for a sense of autonomy and personhood (i.e., encoded in looking ‘older’) and yet ‘keeping’ them in the Tween category and store” (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 219). The trickle-down of teenage fashion into Tween styles coupled with the trickle-up of girlish fashion into adult apparel (such as baby doll dresses and schoolgirl uniforms) combine to blur the boundaries between age categories, where anxieties about female sexualization are most acute.

A particularly vivid exemplar of the anticipatory enculturation of Tweens by marketers is the Bratz brand. According to the Bratz lifestyle brand, the Tween girl’s identity is thoroughly intertwined with consumption, shopping, and fashionable display (McAllister,

2007). Although the earliest products marketed to Tweens included baby and fashion dolls modeling traditional feminine values such as motherhood and domesticity, the introduction of Barbie in the late 1950s marked a shift to the modeling of consumption through doll play, as Barbie encouraged girls to view consumption as adult, individual, and materialistic (McAllister, 2007). According to McAllister (2007), a key distinction between Barbie and Bratz is that while Barbie models consumption for the adults that girls will become, Bratz models consumption for Tween girls at their current ages; “as one Bratz marketing executive explicitly put this, ‘We want the girls to live the Bratz life – wear the mascara; use the hair product; send the greeting card. The toy business is shrinking. Kids are getting older younger and we’re losing them to clothing, computers, and DVDs. If Barbie is about fantasy, then Bratz is about real life’” (McAllister, 2007, p. 250). Apparently, the real life of Tween girls involves shopping for not only Bratz dolls but also for Bratz clothes, DVDs, makeup, magazines, electronics, accessories, and play sets in order to emulate the dolls’ well-manicured, fashionable, and slender appearances. Anticipatory enculturation processes such as those exemplified by the Bratz brand encourage Tweens to experiment with the beauty products and consumption practices that advertisers seem to require for teen girls, allowing retailers to breed and groom a group of new consumers who are responsible for billions of dollars in purchases per year.

How Girls Negotiate their Relationships to the Curvaceously Thin Ideal in the New Media Environment

Despite these seemingly inexorable pressures fracturing preadolescent girls’ relationships with their bodies, some scholars have found hope that new media technologies will provide girls with an opportunity to escape the rigid strictures of “emphasized” femininity and explore alternative relationships to their bodies in the disembodied space of the Internet. As explained in Thiel’s (2005) review of this perspective, “while online,

limitations of real-world bodies may be overcome as well, as its participants 'by-pass the boundaries delineated by cultural constructs of beauty, ugliness, and fashion' (Reid, 1991, p. 42) and overcome the boundaries of gender, race, class, and age" (Haraway, 1991; Reid, 1991, as cited in Thiel, 2005, p. 185). In her seminal book *Life on the Screen*, Sherry Turkle (1995) described how assuming different identities and appearances online may prove therapeutic. In Turkle's concept of "windowing," people "distribute" themselves across multiple online settings, conversations, and activities, behaving differently in each context and taking on different roles in each "window" simultaneously (see Thiel, 2005, p. 184). Davies (2004) discussed the ways in which online game play provides a safe space in which girls can experiment with roles and identities in an anonymous environment, contending that "girls use the web as an arena in which they can explore identities, confide, confess, and challenge using a whole range of discourse in partial anonymity" (p. 44). According to these Internet utopians, the capacity of gender performativity (in a Butlerian sense) afforded by Internet activities such as role-playing, web publishing, video production, and other active forms of creativity on the Web should allow girls to transcend the culturally imposed confines of the curvaceously thin ideal and fashion their own identities in the limitless realm of gender-play, experimentation with self-representation, and alternative models of femininity accessible online.

Other scholars have offered a more nuanced view of the potential of the Internet and information and communication technologies (ICT) to revolutionize girls' relationships to their bodies. Valentine and Holloway (2002) contend that academics have carved out two extreme positions regarding the relationship between the online and offline worlds: that of the booster and that of the debunker (p. 304). According to Valentine and Holloway (2002), "boosters" see ICTs as offering unlimited, utopian potential for exploration and freedom,

and “debunkers” see ICTs as inauthentic simulations of “real” life that displace users’ participation in off-line social relationships. Valentine and Holloway (2002) argue that both of these positions miss the point that online experiences are grounded in the context of users’ everyday offline lives; “despite utopian discourses about disembodiment that promote virtual spaces as spaces of freedom and liberation, these still have to be accessed from bodies located in offline worlds, with all the constraints this involves” (p. 312). As Manago, Graham, Greenfield, and Salimkhan (2008) found in their study of self-presentation on the social networking site MySpace, users of ICTs import knowledge and socialization of gender roles and behaviors into their online lives. Based on their study, Manago, Graham, Greenfield, and Salimkhan (2008) conclude, “MySpace users do not arrive at their computers devoid of previous social norm knowledge and gendered notions may provide a foundation for what to expect in this new medium” (p. 455). Therefore, gendered scripts of culturally preferred performances of masculinity and femininity follow users online and limit the extent to which users can experiment with their online identities. In the final telling, then, both the boosters and the debunkers are correct; as Livingstone and Bober (2003) write, “the Internet is a new context...between normative expectation and creative experimentation” (p. 31, as cited in Schofield Clark, 2005, p. 218). As such, scholars interested in the relationship between girls, their bodies, and new media must conclude that the Internet is neither the smoking gun nor magic bullet in terms of girls’ acceptance of the curvaceously thin ideal. Given the potential of the Internet to facilitate both creativity and conformity, what matters for media scholars is assessing and understanding how the medium is used within the contexts of children’s everyday lives.

However, it is not just the identity-creation possibilities of the Internet that vary depending on use and context; girls’ relationships to the curvaceously thin ideal in online

settings also vary, as the Internet provides tools and spaces for girls to both reinforce and resist the thin ideal. Here, it is instructive to consider Susan Douglas's (1994) argument that women's relationships to the media reflect a contradictory, love-hate dynamic that is shaped by conflicting discursive mandates about what it means to be an American woman and her appropriate role in society. She describes the typically female binary of "solid confidence" and "abject insecurity" (Douglas, 1994, p. 8) that facilitates women and girls' vacillation between empowerment and disconsolation in relationship to the mass media. The dialectical tension between being drawn to and repulsed by the mass media is what Douglas (1994) characterizes as the essential position of the American woman toward the media, regardless of racial, class, or age identifications (pp. 18-19). According to Rebekah Willett's (2008) apt description:

Analyses which describe girls either as subjects of negative effects of media images or as active agents who are employing media and fashion as cultural resources are both problematic, overlooking things girls are doing and leaving issues unresolved. By focusing on the negative effects of media, we overlook times when girls express awareness and critique of the ways they are being positioned by the media. Similarly, by celebrating girls' active resistance to or transformation of popular culture, we can simplify the powerful structures in girls' lives and overlook the complex ways girls are negotiating these structures (p. 422).

Therefore, girls must be understood as capable of both enjoying and rejecting depictions of women and girls in the media concurrently, of engaging with media on a continuum of criticism from complete acceptance to total renunciation depending on their positions in relation to a specific media text during particular moments in time and space.

The literature about girls' use of the Internet and ICTs confirms the diversity of ways in which girls interact with online media content. Although girls can experiment with alternative relationships to their bodies and femininities online, body dissatisfaction and anxiety about the proper performance of gender roles often follows them online and constrains the free range of their explorations. Previous research has certainly documented

how girls are able to use the Internet and ICTs to negotiate new relationships to their bodies, filling the need for “spaces where they can know what they know and try new identities without self-censoring” (Bentley, 1999, pp. 219-220). In her discourse analysis of the online community *Babyz*, a game in which girls care for virtual infants, Davies (2004) argued that while many girls use the website in ways that mirror the traditional care-taker discourses inherent to the maternal stereotype, some participants resist and repurpose the site to explore alternative roles, from babysitter/nanny to doctor to employer/employee to computer programmer. Davies (2004) also detailed the ways in which *Babyz* players create new functions of the game (such as “hexing” to edit the game environment and babysitting other users’ *babyz*), contending that the program empowers girl users by giving them experience with website design, discussion board participation, and online collaboration. Based on her study of how adolescent girls construct identity via instant messaging (IM), which combined in-depth interviews with analysis of the interview participants’ IM conversations, Thiel (2005) concluded that the most significant change in identity construction brought on by IM may be girls’ ability to “try on” and experiment with different facets of their identities, inhabiting multiple versions of themselves simultaneously. Thiel (2005) stated, “It is clear that IM provides a ripe landscape for a girl to shift from identity to identity (for example, student to sexpot), and from moment to moment, particularly when she carries on several different conversations at once” (p. 197). Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2009) contend that online spaces provide safe environments where girls can experiment with “rebellious femininities” and challenge the assumptions of girls who subscribe to the mandates of “emphasized femininity.” In these authors’ interviews, girls also indicated that they felt more free and comfortable in experimenting with interpersonal relationships, particularly romantic ones, in online settings such as IM that

allow them the ability to share personal information and feel confident in expressing their opinions that they might not otherwise articulate.

However, the literature indicates that girls' experiences online often reinforce and validate their offline experiences of body politics, gender norms, and beauty mandates. As indicated in the previous discussion of Internet boosters and debunkers, children's online experiences are situated within and contingent upon their offline identities. Valentine and Holloway (2002) found that children in their study used their online identities to extend and enhance their offline identities, not to create a distinct, detached persona with no bearing on their everyday social needs and concerns. Furthermore, "when children take on other personas, it is invariably to adopt what they regard as more desirable or powerful identities than their own – which for both girls and boys means retaining their gender identity but representing themselves as older and very heterosexually desirable" (Valentine & Holloway, 2002, p. 310). Although she did find that IM allowed girls to "play with" multiple roles and identities, Thiel (2005) also noticed that the IM users in her study often replicated body-critical discourses encountered in the "real world" when they were online. Thiel (2005) found that "many conversations among nearly all of the girls were concerned with looks and in particular, body weight...Conversations abound among girlfriends about weight and eating and did not change among different races and classes" (p. 195). Therefore, while the Internet and IM could facilitate a safe space in which girls can shed body-related anxieties and explore other facets of their identities, Thiel's findings indicated that girls replicated the same kinds of body dissatisfaction discourses in their IM conversations that are evident throughout the media.

Additional research indicates that although new media technologies theoretically offer girls limitless opportunities to explore their gendered identities, in reality these

opportunities for exploration are circumscribed by the constrictions of traditional performances of femininity. Based upon research with 24 boys and 24 girls between the ages of eight and eleven who participated in video game clubs in two after-school settings, Walkerdine (2006) found that boys, who have been socialized to understand that displays of competitiveness, dominance, and competence are unambiguously positive and affirming of their masculinity, do not experience hesitation when playing games that capitalize on these masculine attributes. However, Walkerdine (2006) found that girls negotiate and soften their performances of competitiveness and assertion in video game play by displaying cooperation, caring, and other feminine qualities, as manifest in the fact that girls' favorite avatars in the games they played in the club were cute and cuddly, like Kirby, Pikachu, Princess Peach, and Angelica (p. 523). Walkerdine (2006) argued that many girls chose cute, cuddly, and approachable avatars as a means of negotiating the masculinity of competitive game play; "[these avatars] combine cuteness with power and therefore may come closest to the possibility of competitiveness and classic femininity" (p. 523). Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2009) found that beauty and a sexualized body seemed to be prerequisites for girls inhabiting a female avatar in role-playing chat rooms. For example, one participant was not allowed to participate in a role-playing chat room because her avatar was not sufficiently sexy; "if your picture doesn't show some scantily clad woman, they kick you out" (p. 148). Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2009) suggest that gender boundaries are heavily policed online so that avatars' nicknames, appearances, behaviors, and language choices align with appropriate signifiers of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, although online spaces offer girls some opportunities to experiment with different aspects of their social identities, the girls in these studies still encountered the limitations of gender expectations for appearance and behavior in online contexts.

Another aspect of the ways in which girls negotiate their relationships to the curvaceously thin ideal in the new media environment that must be considered is the enhanced capacities for cultural production and media creation afforded by the Internet and ICTs. It is fair to assume that, despite the digital divide, the majority of American children have Internet access at home; according to a large-scale Kaiser Family Foundation survey, among all eight- to eighteen-year-olds, 84 percent reported Internet access at home in 2009, with 33 percent having Internet access in their bedrooms (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). And despite the popular myth that girls do not see themselves as computer users because technology is associated with masculinity, Mercier, Barron, and O'Connor (2006) found no gender difference between sixth and eighth graders' self-identification as computer-type people who know a lot about computers, spend a lot of time with computers, and enjoy using computers. Therefore, American girls should be seen as having the potential to be fully equipped producers of digital culture.

Of course, girls' creation of their own media and cultural products is not a new phenomenon born of the Internet and ICTs. The Riot Grrrl grassroots movement that emerged out of Washington, D.C., and Olympia, Washington, in the 1990s was characterized by young women's do-it-yourself cultural production, which included forming punk-rock bands (such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile) and independent record labels, developing home-made, cut-and-paste 'zines, and circulating poetry and art on websites (Riordan, 2001). As Riordan (2001) describes the movement, "through their writing, art, and music, Riot Grrrls have mobilized girls and women into a movement where they are active producers and not just passive consumers of culture" (p. 286; see Riordan, 2001, pp. 285-289, for a more detailed discussion of the Riot Grrrl movement). Although the Riot Grrrls' creations were typically critical of mediated representations of femininity and attacked commercial media

unabashedly, their movement also involved consciousness-raising activities and group organizing around social justice causes in order to offer constructive solutions to the problems of representation that their music, 'zines, and art often lambasted.

Although as evidenced by the Riot Grrrl movement, girls' cultural production is nothing new in American culture, the ability of girls to create media and build community using the Internet and ICTs in the comfort and privacy of their bedrooms is an important advancement in girls' capabilities to produce cultural texts. Since McRobbie and Garber's (1976) landmark essay "Girls and Subcultures," cultural studies scholars have recognized the central position that the bedroom occupies in girls' relationships to media culture; Frith (1978) went so far as to say that "girl culture starts and finishes in the bedroom" (p. 65). McRobbie and Garber (1976) conceptualized bedrooms as the focal point of girls' culture, which revolved around the shared consumption of commercial magazines and recorded music. In her recent update of the "bedroom culture" thesis, Kearney (2007) critiqued the inherently consumerist orientation of bedroom culture theory, which assumes that girls use their private spaces primarily as sites for consuming commercial culture rather than producing texts of their own. Kearney (2007) argued that scholars must reconceptualize bedroom culture to reflect the productive capacities afforded to girls by video camcorders, the personal computer, and the Internet. She then calls for researchers to investigate girls' cultural production in their bedrooms and how the distribution capabilities afforded by the Internet are allowing girls to create new public spaces where their voices and perspectives can be heard and shared with adults and one another. Davies (2004) described this new public space as an "international cyber bedroom" (p. 48) where girls across the world can "collaborate, interact, and share resources and ideas" (p. 42).

Despite the validity of Kearney's (2007) updated reconceptualization of bedroom culture to reflect the capabilities afforded by new interactive media, it is not sufficient to simply shift the focus of Girls' Studies from the consumption to the production of girls' cultural artifacts. Scholars must also ask how girls' cultural production is informed by consumer media texts (as girls appropriate and repurpose commercial media content toward their own creative ends) as well as how consumer-oriented media is influenced by audience's productive activities in the kind of feedback loop documented by the important *Frontline* report on the creators and marketers of popular culture for teenagers called "The Merchants of Cool" (Frontline, 2001). In other words, consumption and production of media are not two ends on a spectrum of receivers' interactions with the media; the consumptive and productive processes are mutually constitutive, an idea that will be explored as girls in this study create their own photo collages of images of women and girls in the media.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

This study is designed to explore how girls negotiate the “becoming of bodies” in relation to the curvaceously thin ideal they encounter in traditional and online media culture. Previous studies of girls’ relationships to online media, such as those in the *Girl Wide Web* volume edited by Sharon Mazzarella and cited heavily in the preceding literature review, have focused overwhelmingly upon teenage girls’ use of the Internet, rather than preadolescent females (younger than twelve), who are the participants in the present study. The second key omission of volumes like *Girl Wide Web* and other social science research is that of data concerning actual Internet use. As Valentine and Holloway (2002, p. 303) observe, much contemporary social science scholarship about new media is theoretical rather than empirically informed, focusing on abstract conceptualizations and content analyses of new media instead of on how actual users incorporate new media into their everyday lives. When discussing the increasing opportunities to study audiences via online exchanges and websites, Kitzinger (2004) cites only examples of researchers examining online discussions and websites produced by audiences, which seems to constitute passive content analyses of new media users’ products. Similarly, most of the studies in *Girl Wide Web* seem to deploy content analysis methods to examine websites and postings that girls might use or generate, but do not ask actual users about how and why they use the new media and with what effects.

The present study involves engaging participants in creative exercises that facilitate their reflection and criticism of the media they consume regularly within the context of their own homes, thereby combining a “naturalistic” imperative to capture audience’s actual experiences with media in their typical settings with a “creative” goal to facilitate users’ production of reflections and interpretations of the media they consume. The Internet and new media technologies offer researchers unique methodological tools that allow for the

integration of “naturalistic” observation with “creative” engagement with media users, forming a new space in which researchers can enter the sites of media consumption (via the Internet) and pose questions. This study leverages these tools by triangulating online data generation methods that enable girls’ naturalistic interactions with online media (i.e., the email diaries) with in-depth interviews and participants’ creation of their own media products through repurposing digital images of women and girls in the form of photo collages developed in Microsoft PowerPoint.

The Participants

Participants in the study included a racially and socioeconomically diverse group of 22 girls between the ages of nine and eleven who are in grades 4 and 5 from Junior troops of the Girl Scouts of Kentucky’s Wilderness Road Council. It is essential to work with preadolescent rather than adolescent girls in order to understand how girls’ early experiences with media determine their later patterns of relating to their bodies, which are often well established by adolescence, the developmental period upon which most social science research on the topic has focused. According to developmental psychologists, children are socialized into gendered roles and traits through a combination of socio-structural, interpersonal, cognitive-motivational, and biological process, which include media as well as peer, parental, teacher, and socio-structural influences (Leaper & Friedman, 2007). According to Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, the third of the four stages of cognitive development – the concrete operational stage – takes between the ages of seven and twelve (pre-puberty). This study’s participants include children at the older end of this stage (ages nine through eleven) because at this point in their development, children begin to use cognitive processes, such as seriation, transitivity, and classification, central to the incorporation of media messages into self-conceptions. Leaper and Friedman (2007, p. 566)

contend that mass media is an important source for children's acquisition of cultural information about gender, especially in regard to gender self-concepts, stereotypes, and attitudes such as those related to body appearance. As Strasburger (2004, p. 56) described this phenomenon, the media functions as a "super-peer," offering children and teenagers a variety of "scripts" for dealing with issues that they have not yet encountered in their everyday lives. The way in which media functions as a super-peer for children and adolescents can be described with the Adolescent Media Practice Model, in which adolescents are seen as active users of the media who bring their own experiences and motivations to their media consumption (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002, p. 155). In this model, children's developing sense of identity affects their motivations for selecting media content and channels. Attention, interaction with, and interpretation also influence the extent to which media content will be incorporated into children's attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, preadolescent female participants can provide unique insights toward the goal of understanding how media exposure influences the development of eating disorders and other psychological problems later in girls' and women's development.

Although it is possible that Girl Scout troop members may not be representative of a larger population of young girls for several important reasons, the advantages of working with a sample from this population far outweigh the influence of potential confounding factors. It could be argued that parents of girls who join the Girl Scouts are more involved in their daughters' lives and more committed to developing their daughters' leadership skills and self-esteem than typical parents. However, this factor also made the parents more likely to assent to and actively support their daughters' participation in the study by providing transportation to interviews, allowing girls time on the home computer to complete their collages and email diaries, and coordinating with me to schedule girls' interview times. Also,

as a conventionally White, middle-class organization, the Girl Scouts may include a greater proportion of White girls who are more affluent than is characteristic of a larger population of girls. Conversely, the sample of girls recruited for this study represented more racial diversity than the population of Fayette County as a whole, as four of the 22 participants identified as Black/African-American (18% of the sample) compared with the 2009 population estimate that 13.5% of Fayette County's population is Black (University of Louisville Kentucky State Data Center, 2010), and two girls self-identified as being of mixed racial heritage. The girls also came from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds (see demographic table in Appendix A): some girls have two parents who work outside the home, some have fathers who work while their mothers stay home, and some live in single-mother homes or with their grandparents. Although it would be reasonable to question whether the girls participating in this study are representative of a larger population because they are active in a girls' organization that promotes self-esteem and offers merit badges in topics related to the subject of my study, I would argue that the initial interviews allowed me to observe the girls' baseline relationships to their bodies and consider the effect of individual differences in self-esteem on the data collected. Any concerns about external validity are overshadowed by the opportunity to test objectification theory's proposition that media inculcates self-objectification from an interpretive research perspective that gives voice to these girls and their experiences with their bodies and the media.

The Researcher as Instrument

Because I approach this research project from an unequivocally feminist perspective that embraces the researcher's subjectivity as an asset in conducting research that serves the real needs of women and girls (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, pp. 55-57), this methodological discussion would not be complete without a brief self-reflexive exploration of my

investment in the work at hand as a function of my personal history and relationship to my own body. In a qualitative mode of inquiry in which the researcher – not the interview guide or survey questions – serves as the instrument, the researcher identifies her subjective position in relationship to both the project and the participants and strives to hold this stance constant in her interactions with all participants. Therefore, the empirical validity of the findings derives not from posing questions from a position of neutrality and detachment but rather from maintaining a consistent research persona that accounts for both the researcher’s subjective identity and the requirements of facilitating an equitable researcher-participant relationship (which are discussed in greater detail in the following section).

As a White, middle-class preadolescent girl and teenager struggling to cope with a sociocultural environment in which “being smart” and “being pretty” seemed to be mutually exclusive categories, I found myself at ages thirteen and fourteen looking to cultural standards of appearance and beauty – helpfully illustrated on a monthly basis by issues from my subscriptions to *Vogue* and *Teen* magazines – as guides for navigating the treacherous transition from middle school to high school. Although I was often asked by friends, family members, and strangers about whether I had ever thought about modeling, no one had ever made similar inquiries about whether I had ever thought about being a writer or a scholar. Therefore, it was clear to me that “being pretty” was the sensible identity to cultivate, as it seemed to afford more social capital than “being smart” ever could. Following this logic as I prepared for the transition to high school, I vowed to shed the dreaded baby fat around my midsection and subjected myself to a rigorous dieting regimen that involved monitoring and restricting everything I ate, using a food journal to document my daily caloric intake. Employing the intellectual assiduousness that I normally reserved for my schoolwork, I became an expert in nutrition, exercise, and weight management by studying dieting books,

health magazines, and calorie-counting references, and lo and behold, I lost 20 pounds in a couple of months' time. Rather than being met with concern, my weight loss was greeted with praise, admiration, and jealousy among friends and family, who would comment regularly on how wonderful I looked and how much I had changed. Addicted to the adulation I gained from my thin physique, I redoubled my commitment to managing my weight to the point that I developed a full-blown case of anorexia nervosa that took over my life for the next seven years.

I will spare the self-indulgent details of my bout with an eating disorder that so often characterize discussions of the disease, such as the so-called "voice books" mentioned earlier, which can serve as instructional manuals for girls and women who gravitate toward disordered eating as a coping mechanism. My experience with anorexia involved years of therapy and counseling, work with nutritionists and psychiatrists, full-time outpatient care, loss of friends/boyfriends and alienation of family, and desperate attempts to validate my appearance, including an ill-advised decision to enter a modeling contest at age eighteen. The most important observation about my experience of anorexia for the purposes of this project is that the disorder consumed my cognitive and spiritual resources, occupying my mind and body like a hostile invader determined to break the will of the colonized. Consistent with objectification theory's propositions, I was constantly distracted from full participation in my own life by shame, anxiety, and fear about food, eating, my weight, and how others perceived my appearance.

Despite years of therapy that facilitated hours of discussion about what I was experiencing and how I could take steps to develop a healthier relationship to food and my body, I held onto my eating disorder like a life preserver during my undergraduate college career. My decision to recover stemmed not from realizing through therapy that all I needed

to do to heal was simply to eat a burger and to know that I am beautiful just the way I am, but instead from my involvement in a relationship in which my partner would not tolerate the diminished person I had become by devoting all of my awareness to monitoring and disciplining my body. With his help, I began to recognize the time and possibilities that I had wasted by dedicating my entire being to managing my body's appearance, and I became angry at the sociocultural pressures that had sold me the idea that thinness is synonymous with acceptance, success, and happiness. My budding feminist consciousness flowered into full bloom as I read books like *The beauty myth* by Naomi Wolf and *Backlash* by Susan Faludi and attributed responsibility for my eating disorder not to my own failings and weaknesses, but to a sociocultural environment that prizes women primarily for their looks and undermines women who seek power, authority, and self-determination. Although it required continued support from health professionals and loved ones, my recovery from anorexia truly began when I adopted a feminist stance and a critical attitude toward the mediated images that I felt prioritized the value of thinness over every other aspect of a woman's being and persuaded me that disciplining my body was the most effective means of negotiating my adult identity. Therefore, I was drawn to objectification theory as an explanation for how disordered eating and depression develop in young women as well as media literacy techniques as a means to facilitate critical consciousness about media images because both resonate with my experiences with disordered eating and recovery.

The Dynamics of the Researcher-Participant Relationship

Given the particular contours of my identity as a researcher and the girls as participants in this study, it is important to explicitly examine the dynamics of the relationship that is formed when we came together for the initial interview and beyond into later phases of the study. As Kaufman (1992) argues, qualitative interviews are not an

instrument designed to produce data but *are* data by their very nature; “that is, they are collaborative performances of an evolving, politically inflected relationship between the participants” (as cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 57). In the case of these interviews between a twenty-six-year-old female researcher and nine- to eleven-year-old female participants, the collaborative performance involved my adoption of what Nancy Mandell (1988) terms the “least-adult role” when interacting with the girls. The least-adult role entails suspending all adult-like characteristics except physical size in order to engage with children as relative equals, taking children seriously as experts in their lived experiences and stripping away all pretense of the researcher’s superiority by virtue of his or her citizenship in the world of “mature” adulthood.

The conventional attitude toward children as “inferior” or “underdeveloped” adults to be researched is exemplified by MacBeth’s (2004) discussion of children’s attention to and comprehension of their encounters with the media: “Children’s attention to the comprehension of and memory for events they encounter, in both the real world and through media, is constrained by their cognitive development. To the extent that their knowledge is faulty, their processing of information will be affected” (p. 212). This line of thinking privileges adult ways of knowing as standard and assesses children’s knowledge in terms of their development toward adopting adult paradigms and perspectives. In doing so, MacBeth (2004) negates the validity of children’s ways of knowing and understanding the world prior to their socialization into adult knowledge frameworks. Tammivaara and Enright (1986) provide an apt metaphor for this adult-centric perspective: “Any adult ethnographer who traipses through a child’s world smug in the certainty that the adult world is the highest known form of civilization and a distant goal that young children have just begun to strive for is not unlike the stereotypical ‘Ugly American’ tourist invading the shores of exotic

cultures only to find them quaint but clearly inferior” (p. 234). If a researcher views children from the perspective of adult knowledge, then children will always seem to operate at a deficit, and their cognitive development will be measured in terms of its resemblance to adult ways of thinking. This perspective is clearly articulated in the following passage: “Until such knowledge has developed to its mature form, children’s attention, comprehension, and memory will be driven by their incomplete/inaccurate knowledge in any given domain” (MacBeth, 2004, p. 212). However, if a researcher makes the effort to question their biases toward “mature” cognitive processing strategies and recognize that children process information in different (rather than inferior or inaccurate) ways than adults do, then we may begin to explore children’s worlds as legitimate, fully formed domains of study. To do so, researchers must have the humility to shed their presumptions of superiority granted by their “mature” knowledge and address children on their own levels, considering them to be experts in a subject that adult researchers cannot comprehend: childhood.

Toward the goal of relinquishing an adult-centric perspective in this research project, I consciously cultivated the least-adult role of an interested older sister or cousin who is not far removed from her own experiences of girlhood. Tammivaara and Enright (1986) assert that children have membership in at least two cultures: one of their making with their peers and one created by adults; “the ‘openness’ and ‘spontaneity’ adults so often attribute to children are probably only adults’ perceptions of this dual membership and fluidity, and of the skill with which most children seem to be able to move in and out of the two different worlds they inhabit” (p. 234). Just as children hold dual citizenship in the adult and child worlds and can move seamlessly between the two, it is possible for adults to modify aspects of their self-presentation “so that if they are not perceived as children, they may be perceived as out-of-the-ordinary adults” (Tammivaara & Enright, 1986, p. 229). Having both

experience with older female friends and experience as an older friend to young girls, this role is relatively familiar, well-practiced, and enjoyable for me to perform. Although I cannot claim the success of my participants in navigating between adult and child worlds, I was able to play the role of out-of-the-ordinary least-adult to build rapport in the interview context by demonstrating a familiarity with and genuine interest in girls' culture, media, and experiences. I actually listen to Katy Perry, Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez, and Justin Bieber and follow Tween celebrity gossip (Taylor Lautner is dating Demi Lovato now, not Taylor Swift!) in order to be able to converse fluently with girls in a way that reflects my sincere interest in them and their worlds. Because I am only fifteen years older than the girls, I can credibly share stories about my experiences as a girl and elicit stories about their lives that are totally unrelated to the study, such as their pets, their hobbies, and their experiences in school. I was able to match the tone and cadence of my vernacular to the girls' by peppering my speech with words such "like," "totally," "cool," "you know," "awesome," "and stuff" as well as speaking in a higher pitched voice and at a faster pace than I normally do and spending some time in every interview giggling with the girls. I feel as though my adoption of the least-adult role was effective because at the end of their interviews, several of the girls wanted to know how old I actually am.

In addition to assuming a least-adult role in my interactions with the girls, I also took care to minimize the power differentials inherent to researcher-participant interactions by employing strategies emerging from Goody's (1978) concept of question modes, which are associated with a valence indicating the "effect *for the questioner* of initiating that mode" (p. 27, cited in Tammivaara & Enright, 1986). The one-up position assigns a positive valence, as it conveys the superior knowledge or judgment of the questioner. The one-down position assigns a negative valence to the questioner, indicating a request posed by a lower status

person to a higher status person where a pointedly direct question would violate the power relationship between the two. Because I was eliciting information from girls about sensitive, personal topics including their relationships with their bodies and dieting/exercise that in some cases they do not even discuss with their parents, the interview structure automatically placed me in a “one-up” position, as the girls were asked to share intimate details about their lives with someone they had only met once before at the recruiting meetings prior to the study. In order to reduce the power-differential and neutralize the “one-up” position I gained by virtue of the nature of the interview, I spent a few minutes at the beginning of every interview self-disclosing to the girls about my experiences with an eating disorder, in a sense answering the questions I was about to pose to them pre-emptively so that they understood my history and perspective. Below is a transcript of my typical introduction:

Well, because I'm going to be asking you all of these questions about yourself and what you think about your body, I want to at the beginning of the interview tell you a little bit about myself and why I'm doing this particular study. Like, I mean, in graduate school, you could study anything you want to, right? You can pick whatever topic you want to, so you're probably like, why does she want to study girls' body image and media use? So, just so you know where I'm coming from, actually when I was a few years older than you, I started to feel really bad about my body and had lots of self-esteem problems, and I actually had an eating disorder when I was a teenager. I want to do this study and learn more about this and talk to girls about it because I want to understand my own experience and learn from girls who are in a similar position dealing with all this stuff, all of these different pressures at your age and what it's like to be a girl right now. So it's really a personal thing for me and something I care a lot about. Because I have experience with it in my own life, I know that some of these questions might feel really personal, and you might not want to talk about them. So it's totally fine at any point in the interview, if there's a question that you don't want to talk about for whatever reason, you just say “skip it” and we go on to the next one, no problem, no questions asked. It doesn't mess up anything, and it's no problem for me, OK?

Especially when inquiring about sensitive, personal topics like body image and dieting, it is not ethical for researchers to uncaringly and unfeelingly probe young participants' lives and experiences. The researcher must give generously of herself and her perspectives in order to elicit information, opinions, and feelings from children. Researchers have an obligation to

make themselves and their positions known in the interview context so that young participants feel safe in self-disclosing.

Once my position relative to the subject was made known to the participants, I was able to respond to comments that required further questioning or affirmation. When answering questions about whether they ever worried about being too thin or too heavy, some girls voiced derogatory and unhealthy comments about their appearances; for example, nine-year-old Stacy McGuire said that she wanted to lose weight because “I don’t want to be fat, I want to be thin, like everybody else.” In order to question her conclusion that she needed to lose weight, I responded by saying, “Well, I just want to tell you that I think you look great; you don’t have to worry about anything! But thank you for sharing! I just wanted to tell you that so you know what I think.” Without voicing my rejection of the conclusion that she needs to lose weight, Stacy might have left the interview feeling as though I agreed with her. Conversely, some girls offered healthy and well-adjusted responses to my questions about what the “perfect” woman or girl looks like that deserved praise; for example, Kam said, “I don’t really think there is a perfect girl. I think we’re all perfect in our own ways,” to which I responded, “That’s an awesome answer!” In this way, because I made my perspective and opinions clear to the girls at the beginning of the interview, I could offer support of positive statements and critique negative statements that girls made about their bodies.

Other strategies for relating to child-participants were helpful in my interactions with the girls. Following the observation that “children tend to identify any setting in which an adult asks a series of questions to children as a *lesson*” (Tammivaara & Enright, 1986, p. 230), I explicitly informed children that the study is *not* like schoolwork:

This study is really about your ideas, your opinions, your stories. It’s not like school where there’s a right or a wrong answer, yes or no, anything like that. It’s all about

what you think. So, you never have to worry about answering the question in the way that I want you to or anything like that. It's just whatever you think, whatever you feel, however you respond to it, that's the right answer as far as I'm concerned, OK?

This strategy seemed to be very successful, as upon completion of their participation in the study, girls often conveyed that they enjoyed performing the study tasks and did not feel like any of the tasks were difficult or boring to complete.

I also regularly “played dumb” to take on the role of a confused conversational partner who required the girl's guidance in order to understand the valuable information that she was providing. For example, when asking girls about their attitudes toward food and dieting, I would follow up with questions and statements such as “What are those thoughts like?”; “Why do you think being overweight is something to avoid?”; and “That's really interesting. I never thought about it that way. Could you tell me more about that?” Although girls' nonverbal cues made it clear that they thought I was clueless not to know why they would want to avoid being overweight, it afforded me a “one-down” position that gave girls the opportunity to educate me about how they see their worlds. To conclude, conducting research with children as participants should not be undertaken employing the same techniques as research involving adult participants. Researchers must carefully select the appropriate least-adult role and strategize about how to reduce the power differentials inherent to the research project at hand in order to respect the integrity of children's lived experiences without superimposing an adult-centric perspective on the project, which could rob participants of their voices, invalidate the project's findings, and ultimately undermine the research objective of creating knowledge helpful in addressing problems of importance to children's health and wellbeing.

Recruitment

I obtained the support and sponsorship of the Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road Council based in Lexington to recruit 22 participants between the ages of nine and eleven who represented a wide range of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds from four different Junior troops (including girls in grades 4 and 5) to participate in the study. The process of recruiting participants involved presenting information about the study and coordinating with members of all levels of the organization, from the Council-level leadership to individual leaders of Junior troops. In the summer of 2010, I contacted the Communication Director of the Wilderness Road Council and scheduled a presentation about the study for the director and two key staff members responsible for membership activities and Girl Scouts programming in Central Kentucky. After obtaining buy-in from the organizational leadership, I scheduled an informational session about the study during the monthly meeting of the Service Unit Managers, the Girl Scout volunteers responsible for coordinating the activities of troops of all ages around Central Kentucky. Each Service Unit Manager has jurisdiction over different geographic areas and could be considered the "gatekeepers" to contacting troop leaders. Following the Service Unit Managers meeting, I set up informational sessions during the service unit meetings of three managers in the Lexington area, which allowed me the opportunity to speak with all of the troop leaders who fall under each of the three service unit managers' respective jurisdictions. At each of these three meetings, I presented information about the study to the convened troop leaders, who work with girls of all ages, not just the Junior troop age range, and circulated a sign-up sheet so that I could contact troop leaders interested in setting up presentations about the study during their troop meetings. Twelve leaders of Junior troops expressed interest providing

their troops with more information about the study, and I was able to set up informational sessions with four troops.

The troop leaders arranged for parents and girls to attend informational sessions in conjunction with regular troop meeting times. After describing the research procedures and incentives to the girls and parents, I provided copies of the consent form for parents to review and sign and copies of the assent form for children to read and sign with the assistance of their parents. Parents also received copies of the list of questions to be asked during the orientation and debriefing interviews as well as questions posed in the email diary. If a parent was not in attendance at the informational meeting, then the participant took a packet of information to bring home for the parent to sign and mail to me. This packet included a self-addressed stamped envelope, a cover letter, a copy of the informed consent form for their records, a copy of the informed consent form for the parent's signature, a form designed to elicit information about the family's socioeconomic status, and information sheets about recognizing the symptoms of eating disorders. The socioeconomic status form was included so that participants did not have to answer questions indicating the socioeconomic status of their parents; the parent provided this information instead. As an incentive, the girls will receive a Girls Voices Survey merit patch from the Wilderness Road Council for their participation in the study. Informed consent from parents and assent from participants was obtained immediately following the informational meetings, which occurred during October and November 2010, and the initial interviews were scheduled at that time.

An important methodological issue relevant to recruiting within organizations is the strategy of involving more participants in every stage of the process in order to account for attrition. As illustrated in Figure 4.1., every step of the process involved some attrition, which makes sense given that the Girl Scouts are a volunteer-based organization in which

every participant – members of the leadership, troop leaders, parents, and the girls themselves – has a limited amount of time available, and priorities are constantly shifting to accommodate fluctuating schedules and commitments. Additionally, even though the girls were enthusiastic to be a part of the study when they signed up, a handful of girls were unable to follow through with completing all of the email diaries and other study tasks due to their overcommitted schedules. Researchers working with girls of this age should be aware that qualitative research projects involving time commitments of longer duration may present retention challenges, as children of this age cannot always follow through with long-term obligations and often participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities that occupy large portions of their time and attention.

A second methodological issue of note is that in a study involving recruitment from a female-centered organization like the Girl Scouts of the USA, working with girls necessarily requires working with their mothers. With a few exceptions, most of which related to providing transportation to the interview site, the girls' mothers took charge of attending the informational meetings, speaking with the girls about their participation in the study, signing the informed consent forms, scheduling interview times, transporting girls to interviews, and other coordination activities, and fathers took a less involved role. Therefore, it is essential for researchers working with young children, especially in regard to topics such as body image and eating issues, to anticipate working closely with mothers and clearly communicate the goals and procedures of the study to both the participants and their mothers at every step in the process.

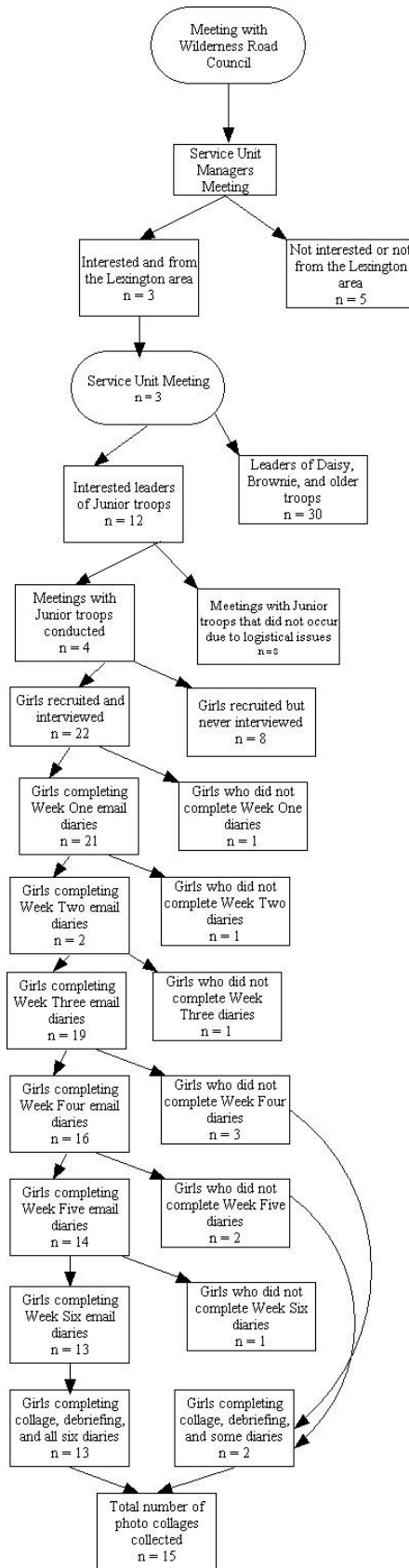


Figure 4.1, Recruiting Flow Chart

Protocol

The first phase of the study involved conducting one-on-one orientation interviews with each of the girls in which I talked with the participants for between 45- to 75-minutes about their relationships to the media and to their bodies. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for later data analysis. The interviews took place in a one-on-one context to ensure that the presence of parents did not influence the participants' responses, as girls may not have felt comfortable openly discussing their media usage practices with parents present who might disapprove of those practices. Many of the questions for this initial interview consisted of items from commonly used psychological scales modified to serve as an interview protocol (see Appendix B), providing a qualitative tool for assessing the girls' baseline levels of objectification theory-related constructs. These questions measure objectification theory constructs such as self-objectification using the Objectified Relationship with the Body subscale of the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale (Tolman & Porche, 2000); body surveillance using the Surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale for Youth (Lindberg, Hyde, & McKinley, 2006); and eating attitudes and dieting behaviors using the Children's Eating Attitudes Test (Maloney, McGuire, Daniels, & Specker, 1989). Other questions include basic demographics, such as age, gender, race, and family characteristics. In this initial interview, I reviewed an example image of a woman's body found in an online media source with the girls and then reviewed the email diary form questions in response to this image to ensure that the participants understood the language in the diary form. In a final portion of the interview, I offered basic training in computer-based collaging techniques that the girls used to collect imagery of women's bodies in the media. To do this, I used a laptop computer to demonstrate how to work with Internet Explorer and Google Images to gather images and PowerPoint to create the collage.

The participants also had the option to use scissors and glue to create the collage if they preferred. As in Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2009), girls were asked during the initial interview to select their own pseudonyms for the purposes of the study.

After the initial orientation interview, the participants developed weekly email diary entries submitted via Qualtrics for a six-week period describing their interactions with images of women and girls in online, televised, and print media contexts. Psychological researchers (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001) have successfully employed diary methods to study experiences of sexual objectification in college-aged populations, finding the diary method to be more accurate in capturing the everyday, easily forgotten, and usually dismissed incidents of sexism in daily life than retrospective methods like surveys and interviews (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001, p. 32). In order to make the diary method accessible for digitally wired young people, Hessler et al. (2003) introduced email diaries as the main data-gathering tool in a qualitative study of adolescent risk behavior, a method that was used in this study. For the first weekly entry, girls were asked questions about how much time they spend with different types of media during a typical day and what types of programs and content they typically consume. For every subsequent weekly entry, girls were asked to identify images of women and girls that they had encountered online, on television, and in print throughout the week and describe their interpretations of and reactions to these images. As in Swim, Hyers, Cohen, and Ferguson's (2001) diary method design (p. 35), girls used an email diary form including open-ended questions based upon the research questions (see Appendix C). Every week, I emailed the participants a link to the diary form (developed using the online survey tool Qualtrics), allowing the researcher to store their responses securely on the Qualtrics server. Following the recommendations of

Hessler et al. (2003), if participants expressed questions or confusion during the data collection period, then I addressed those issues via email.

Most approaches to understanding the relationship between media use and body image disturbances based in the psychological discipline assume that girls and women are passive consumers of mediated imagery of women's bodies. However, the present study asked girls not only to report what media they use and respond to questions about how these media make them feel, but also to create collages that reconfigure media images in ways that are meaningful to them. According to Whiting (2009), the photo collage technique is beneficial in terms of providing children with an enjoyable means to convey their thoughts and emotions as well as eliciting different perspectives than methods that focus on the spoken or written word. Therefore, throughout the email diary phase, the girls were asked to collect between 10 and 20 of the images they responded to in their diary entries and found particularly striking and then put them together into a collage, either using PowerPoint or scissors and glue, depending on their preferences. The only explicit instruction girls were provided about which images to place in their collages was to include whatever images of women and girls from the media that they would like to use and display the images in any way they saw fit, according to their artistic and creative sensibilities.

In combination with information conveyed orally through the interview format and information expressed in written form through the email diaries, the photo collage technique used in this study was designed to capture girls' experiences as both consumers and producers of media related to images of female bodies. Following Kearney's (2007, p. 134) call for more research investigating how the introduction of inexpensive, user-friendly, and productive media technologies have altered girls' bedroom culture, the photo collage technique facilitates girls' production of cultural texts via a *detournement* of commercially

produced media. According to Naomi Klein (1999), *detournement* can be defined as “an image, message, or artifact lifted out of its context to create a new meaning” (p. 282). The use of the photo collage technique can be compared to the zines created by the young women of the Riot Grrrl movement, who took magazines, newspapers, flyers, and other media, cut them up, and pasted the excised words, phrases, and pictures into collages conveying entirely new meanings than those intended by the original producers of the material (Riordan, 2001, p. 288). Unlike more passive ethnographic observations of how girls produce website content and interact with each other online, photo collaging represents a more activist method that opens up spaces in which girls who had never created their own media can begin experimenting with cultural production in the form of *detournement*.

After completing their sixth email diary and the photo collage, the girls participated in a 15- to 30-minute debriefing interview using the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) in which we explored the girls’ thoughts and feelings about the images they collaged as well as their diary entries (see Appendix D). These interviews took place in a one-on-one context and were audio-recorded and transcribed. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) recommend following the diary period with interviews to allow participants to clarify the contexts, motives, and consequences of their entries. In addition to serving a debriefing function for the diary portion of the study, the ZMET allowed me to explore how the girls process media imagery of women’s bodies, as it is based upon premises about consumer perceptions that are highly applicable to this topic: that thought about imagery is image-based, not thought-based; that most communication is nonverbal; that metaphor is central to thought and crucial to eliciting subconscious and unconscious impressions; that cognition is embodied within sensual and perceptual responses; and that most thought, emotion, and learning occur without conscious awareness (Zaltman, 1997). The ZMET has been used in

studies for which children served as participants (El-Bassiouny, Taher, & Abou Aish, 2008, p. 8), including in the design of the new Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh (Bilec et al., 2009). Briefly, the ZMET employed in this interview involved five steps (Coulter, Zaltman, & Coulter, 2001), although questions were altered to respond to each girl's specific collage:

1. Storytelling. Participants were asked to describe how each picture relates to her impressions of women's bodies in the media in narrative form.
2. Missed images. The interviewer inquired about whether the participants had any impressions about women's bodies in the media for which she could not find an appropriate image. The participant then discussed the impression and described an image that would illustrate that impression.
3. Construct elicitation. The participants were asked to select three images that "stick out" to them and describe how any two of the images they selected are similar yet different from the third in terms of how they portray women's bodies to help facilitate the participants' ability to make connections between the images.
4. Sensory images. The interviewer asked the participants to use taste, touch, smell, sound, color, and emotional feeling to describe their responses to the images of women's bodies in their collages.
5. The summary image. The participants selected the single image or group of images that best describes their overall opinions of the portrayal of women's bodies in the media and explain how the image represents their thoughts and feelings. The participants could also describe how they might want to alter the image(s) to better correspond to their overall impressions of women's bodies in mediated imagery.

Taken together, the weekly email diary entries and ZMET debriefing interview on the girls' collages created a multifaceted bricolage illustrating how young girls select, interact

with, and interpret media and contribute a more subtle, subject-centered understanding of girls' reception of mediated imagery in the 21st century.

Data Analysis

The initial and debriefing/ZMET interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for the analysis and interpretation phases of the project. Because I received the emails in batches on a weekly basis, I followed a rolling process of data analysis as soon as the girls started sending me emails. I also used the Qualtrics report generation function to create reports of quantitative media use data. As per Spiggle (1994) and the approach to coding qualitative data described in Lindlof and Taylor (2002), my data analysis process began with coding and categorizing the data by labels that describe what each “chunk” of data is about and sorting out potentially meaningful passages into categorical “bins” of similar chunks (Spiggle, 1994, pp. 493-494). As data accumulated, I collapsed categories into more general constructs at higher levels of abstraction and correlated these constructs with the specific research questions raised in Chapter Two. I used the Google Notebook tool in my account designated for this project to label, organize, and sort the data, as the data set was too small to justify the time investment required to learn a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program like NUD*IST.

Interpretation

My interpretation of the data involved recognizing patterns in the data and bringing disparate constructs into dialogue with one another, in an attempt to gain a “synthetic, holistic, and illuminating grasp of meaning, as in deciphering a code” (Spiggle, 1994, p. 497). Terry Russ's (2008) identification of three levels – personal, interpersonal, and mediated/cultural – of discourse expressed when young women tell their stories about body dissatisfaction proved highly valuable in interpreting the data and facilitated the emergence

of themes representing each level of discourse. Exemplars and in-vivo quotations were essential to my interpretations, as I sought to provide compelling examples of media as an objectifying experience for preadolescent girls, and I situated these exemplars within the interpretive frames constructed by the research questions. To do this, I employed the phenomenological strategy for “unpacking the essence of lived experience” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 237), which consisted of the description, definition, and interpretation of the girls’ reception of mediated images of women’s bodies. The rolling nature of my data collection, in which data poured in steadily over a period of a few months, enabled a hermeneutic process of alternately distancing myself from the data as I conducted analytic manipulation and immersing myself in the transcript texts to intuitively grasp their significance and interconnections. I subscribe to Spiggle’s (1994) description of interpretation as “playful, creative, intuitive, subjective, particularistic, transformative, imaginative, and representative” (p. 500), allowing serendipitous insights emerging from the data to guide my interpretive strategies rather than forcing a predetermined approach to the interpretative process onto the data.

Following the data collection and analysis period, I will use my experience with graphic design to develop a “mini-magazine” featuring the participants’ collages and insights from their diaries and interviews using the participant-identified pseudonyms. This “mini-magazine” will serve as a form of what Willett (2008) calls “participant media production” (p. 425) as well as the venue for sharing data resulting from this study with the Girl Scouts, participants, and parents. Girls and their parents are unlikely to be able or willing to read a thesis manuscript, so it is crucial that, consistent with participatory research projects described by Bishop (2008), participants are provided with access to the findings in a forum that is easy and fun for them to explore and understand.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS REGARDING GIRLS' INTERPRETATIONS OF MEDIATED IMAGERY

The discussion of this study's findings will proceed loosely following the progression of objectification theory's explanatory framework while engaging the research questions identified in Chapter Two. The goal of using objectification theory as a framework to guide this discussion of the study's findings is to illuminate opportunities for researchers, parents, and educators to help girls disrupt the discourses of objectification and body dissatisfaction that permeate their lived experiences and thereby empower girls to avoid consequences of self-objectification such as disordered eating and depression. We will begin with an analysis of the data gathered from the Week One email diaries regarding girls' media use as well as a critical evaluation of girls' conceptions and interpretations of mediated imagery of idealized girlhood. Then, the discussion will turn to the next stage in the objectification theory's framework: how girls experience objectified body consciousness and body monitoring/surveillance in their daily lives. The final chapter describing the study's findings will analyze how the final phase of objectification theory's progression was manifest in the girls' descriptions of their relationships with food, dieting, and their bodies in the context of interpersonal communication within their social networks.

The Form and Content of Girls' Media Usage

In order to respond to the first research question regarding what sources of new and traditional media girls actually use and how they use them, this analysis will proceed in two parts. The first part summarizes the media use data gathered in the girls' Week One email diaries, and the second develops a typology of how girls interpret images of women and girls they encounter in the media. The data collected regarding the amount of time girls spend interacting with the media was self-reported by the girls in their Week One email diaries,

which might cast doubts regarding the accuracy of their reporting. For example, Table 5.1. totaling the number of hours girls spend with the media shows that some girls think that they spend 15+ hours with the media on weekdays, which seems highly improbable given their school and family schedules, and spend more than 24 hours with the media on a typical weekend day, which would be impossible even if they were “media multi-tasking,” as suggested in Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010). However, the email diary questions did not account for media used simultaneously (e.g., listening to music online, watching movies on TV), which could explain to some degree the unrealistically high number of hours girls reported spending using media, as girls may have “double-reported” their media use. More important for the purposes of this discussion is girls’ *perception* of their media use, rather than a completely accurate account of the amount of time they actually spend in front of a television or computer screen. Regardless of whether the amount of time girls reported reflects the actual amount of time they spend with the media, the media use data here provides meaningful evidence of the relative importance of various media to the girls in this study, as measured by perceived amounts of time they spend with television, magazines, music, computers, video games, movies, and non-school books. The data indicate that in general, girls spend more time with the media on weekend days than weekdays and spend less time with magazines, video games, movies, and non-school books than they do with television, music, and computers/online activities, although the data suggest that girls typically watch a movie on weekend days.

Table 5.1. Means and standard deviations for amount of time spent with the media.
* n=21, ** n=20

Medium	Hours with Media on a Typical Weekday		Hours with Media on a Typical Weekend Day	
	Mean Dev.	Standard	Mean Dev.	Standard
Television*	1.74	1.36	3.81	2.45
Magazines*	0.43	0.91	0.64	1.2
Music*	2.23	2.26	2.92	2.56
Computer/Online**	1.8	2.68	2.74	3.43
Video Games*	0.79	1.29	1.5	1.55
Movies*	0.88	1.28	2.79	1.61
Non-school Books**	1.2	0.77	2.03	1.89

In the Week One email diary form, girls were also asked to report their three favorite types of content or programming for each medium. For example, girls listed the names of three favorite TV shows or channels to indicate which programs or types of TV they typically watch. Frequency tables listing the types of media content girls reported using on a typical basis are provided below.

Table 5.2. Frequency with which girls mentioned television shows or channels

Television Show or Channel	Frequency
Disney Channel	13
Nick Channel	10
Cartoon Network	5
PBS Kids	2
iCarly (Nick)	5
Wizards of Waverly Place (Disney)	5
Hannah Montana (Disney)	2
Phineas and Ferb (Disney)	3
ABC Family	1
MTV	1
BET	1
ION Television	1
Unnatural History (Cartoon Network)	1
Good Luck Charlie (Disney)	1
Merlin (BBC)	1
Spongebob Squarepants (Nick)	1
Cake Boss (TLC)	1
Cyber Chase (PBS Kids)	1
Sonny with a Chance (Disney)	1

Table 5.2. (Continued) Frequency with which girls mentioned television shows or channels

Shake It Up (Disney)	1
One Tree Hill (WB)	1
American Idol (Fox)	1
Big Time Rush (Nick)	1

As seen above, 18 out of 21 girls (86%) mentioned either the Disney channel or specific Disney channel programs or both as a type of television that they typically watch. Nickelodeon (or Nick) channel programming is also popular among participants. In terms of specific programs, *iCarly* on Nick and *Wizards of Waverly Place* on Disney seem to be the most frequently watched among participants. For the uninitiated, *iCarly* revolves around the life of Carly Shay, played by Miranda Cosgrove, a teenager who produces her own web show called *iCarly* with her best friends Sam (her co-host) and Freddie (their tech-savvy producer). The TV show follows their friendship as they become online celebrities for their show, which features talent contests, recipes, problem-solving, and dancing. *Wizards of Waverly Place* stars Selena Gomez as Alex Russo, a wizard-in-training who, along with her older and younger brothers who are also wizards, must keep her identity as a wizard secret while living in the mortal world. The Russo siblings live with their Italian-American father, a former wizard, and their Mexican-American mother, who is a mortal.

As seen in Table 5.3., magazines are not frequently used among this group of preadolescent girls. Several girls could not list even one example of a magazine that they read, saying instead that they do not read them at all.

Table 5.3. Frequency with which girls mentioned specific magazines

Magazine Name	Frequency
American Girl	3
Discovery Girls	2
Bop	2
Popstar!	2
TMZ	1
Healthy Cooking Taste of Home	1
National Geographic Kids	1

Table 5.3. (Continued) Frequency with which girls mentioned specific magazines

Pixie	1
Sports Illustrated Kids	1
Justice	1
Better Homes and Gardens	1
General cooking magazines	1
Jet	1
Essence	1
Family Fun	1
Family Times	1
Bluegrass Dog	1
Highlights	1

Music is very popular among the girls in this study, and several favorite artists emerged from the data (Table 5.4.), including Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, and Miley Cyrus. Although Taylor Swift is not officially affiliated with Disney, she is frequently photographed hanging out with the stars of Disney television shows, such as Selena Gomez and Miley Cyrus, and has toured with the Jonas Brothers. Therefore, the data indicate that Disney-produced music and television are very popular with this study's participants.

Table 5.4. Frequency with which girls mentioned musical artists or genres

Musical Artist or Genre	Frequency
Taylor Swift	8
Selena Gomez	5
Miley Cyrus	4
Justin Bieber	2
Pop	4
Hip-hop	3
Rap	2
Rock	2
Carrie Underwood	1
Big Time Rush	1
Tao Cruz	1
Mary J. Blige	1
Natasha Bedingfield	1
Aly and AJ	1
All Star Weekend	1
Kelly Clarkson	1
Nelly Furtado	1
Lady Gaga	1
Bruno	1
Katy Perry	1

Table 5.4. (Continued) Frequency with which girls mentioned musical artists or genres

Classical	1
Dance	1
Gospel	1
R&B	1
Country	1

Also interesting are the ways in which girls listen to music (Figure 5.1). Many girls use iPods or MP3 players to listen to the music of their favorite artists:






#	Answer	Bar	Response	%
1	Portable CD Player		3	15%
2	Cell Phone		0	0%
3	Internet Radio		1	5%
4	Car Radio		4	20%
5	Online Website		0	0%
6	iPod or MP3 player		9	45%
7	Other		3	15%
	Total		20	

Figure 5.1. The Technologies Girls Use to Listen to Music

Computers and online gaming are also frequent past-times for girls in this study (Table 5.5.):

Table 5.5. Frequency with which girls mentioned websites

Website Name	Frequency
Webkinz (Ganz)	8
YouTube	5
Coolmath Games	4
Google/Gmail	3
Club Penguin (Disney)	2
Disney.com	2

Table 5.5. (Continued) Frequency with which girls mentioned websites

Wizards101	2
Primary Games	2
Microsoft (Word)	2
OurWorld.com	1
Facebook	1
GGG.com (Girls Go Games)	1
Dictionary.com	1
Nickelodeon.com	1
eBay.com	1
J.K. Rowling.com	1
Toon Town.com	1
Miniclip.com (Online Games)	1
Store websites (general)	1
Poptropica.com	1
Reading Plus.com	1
Success Maker.com	1
Reading Counts.com	1
Monster High.com	1
Multiplication.com	1
Cyberchase.com	1
Millsberry.com	1
Mathathon.com	1
Bowbie.com	1
Barbiegirls.com	1
Stardoll.com	1

The clear favorite website of girls in this study is Webkinz, a virtual community of pet animal avatars. The Ganz company sells plush versions of the pets that allow owners access to the Webkinz site by entering the secret code printed on the toys' tags. On the website, users adopt a virtual version of their stuffed toys for a year's subscription of online play. Online gaming and virtual play sites of all kinds surface on this list, including Coolmath Games, Club Penguin, Wizards101, and Primary Games. Notably, Facebook.com is mentioned by only one girl, suggesting that adult social networking sites are not yet popular among this group of girls.

Girls allocate some portion of their time with the media to playing video games, especially games on the Wii console. For this reason, the Wii games are listed first in Table 5.6., followed by other types of video games:

Table 5.6. Frequency with which girls mentioned video games

Video Game	Frequency
Wii	3
Wii Sports	5
Wii Mario Cart	3
Wii Sports Resort	3
Wii Just Dance	4
Wii Fit	1
Wii Bowling	1
Wii Bratz	1
Wii Mario Party	1
Wii Play	2
Wii Dance Party	1
Super Mario Brothers	4
Nintendo DS	3
Dancing with the Stars	1
Lego Star Wars	1
Petz	1
Pokemon	1
Drawn to Life	1
Cooking Mama	1
Guitar Hero	1
Call of Duty	1
Gameboy	1
Jumpin' Bean Island	1
The Crystal Ball Adventure	1
Narnia	1
Tightwire (iPod touch)	1

As indicated in Table 5.1., most girls watch at least one movie on the weekends, and by far the most popular franchise is the Harry Potter series. In Table 5.7, specific movie titles are listed before movie genres.

Table 5.7. Frequency with which girls mentioned specific movie titles or movie genres

Movie Title or Genre	Frequency
Harry Potter series	9
Disney movies	3
The Lovely Bones	1
Fallen	1
Star Wars	1
Hot Lead and Cold Feet	1
Guardians of Ga'hoole	1
Bee Movie	1
Ramona and Beezus	1
Wall-E	1
Madagascar	1
Toy Story 3	1
Despicable Me	1
Mega Mind	1
iCarly the Movie	1
Fred the Movie	1
Tangled	1
Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader	1
Three Men and a Baby	1
Twilight Saga	1
Nightmare Before Christmas	1
Titanic	1
Avatar	1
The Blind Side	1
Hannah Montana Movie	1
Action	2
Comedy	4
Romance/Chick Flicks	3
Horror/Thrillers	2
Drama	1

Additionally, girls seem to watch movies on television using a DVD player more frequently than they watch them at the theaters. In Figure 5.2. describing how girls typically watch movies, participants were allowed to select more than one response:




#	Answer	Bar	Response	%
1	On TV		21	100%
2	At a theater		11	52%
3	On a computer		2	10%

Figure 5.2. The Technologies Girls Use to Watch Movies

Finally, the Harry Potter book series dominated the girls' list of favorite books as well as their list of favorite movies. Also like the list of movies, the list of girls' favorite books (Table 5.8) shows very little convergence around similar titles aside from the Harry Potter series; each girl seems to have relatively distinct favorite books and movies:

Table 5.8. Frequency with which girls mentioned book titles

Book Title	Frequency
Harry Potter series	10
Tuck Everlasting	2
The BFG (Big Friendly Giant)	2
Beautiful Creatures	2
Goosebumps	2
Percy Jackson series	1
Leven Thumps series	1
iCarly: I am your biggest fan	1
The Penderwicks	1
Take Two	1
Trading Faces	1
Cam Jansen	1
Nancy Drew	1
Ready Freddy	1
Hoot	1
The Westing Game	1
Magic Treehouse	1
Lost and Found	1
The Last Holiday Concert	1
Matilda	1
Diary of a Wimpy Kid	1
Franny K. Stein	1

Table 5.8. (Continued) Frequency with which girls mentioned book titles

Princess Diaries	1
Goldie	1
The Two Princesses of Bammar	1
The Princess Tales	1
American Girl	1
Unfinished Angel	1
Ruby Holler	1
Camp Club Girls	1
Chronicles of Narnia	1
Ginger Pye	1
Nod's Limbs	1

In order to effectively estimate each girl's total hours of media, I summed each girl's total hours of media use reported across media types for both typical weekdays and typical weekend days. Then, I calculated means and standard deviations for each data set (weekday and weekend) to determine categories of media use frequencies: low, below average, average, above average, and high.

Table 5.9. Categories for typical weekday media use

Category	Number of Hours	Standard Deviations from Mean
Low	> 2.2	> -1 (16% of data)
Below average	2.2-5.55	-1 to -0.5 (17% of data)
Average	5.55-12.25	-0.5 to +0.5 (34% of data)
Above average	12.25-15.6	+0.5 to +1 (17 percent of data)
High	< 15.6	< +1 (16% of data)

Table 5.10. Categories for typical weekend media use

Category	Number of Hours	Standard Deviations from Mean
Low	> 7.4	> -1 (16% of data)
Below average	7.4-11.65	-1 to -0.5 (17% of data)
Average	11.65-20.15	-0.5 to +0.5 (34% of data)
Above average	20.15-24.4	+0.5 to +1 (17 percent of data)
High	< 24.4	< +1 (16% of data)

The Table 5.11. lists each girl's total hours of media use on typical weekdays and typical weekend days and places them within one of the five categories described above. The

mean and standard deviation of total hours of media use for typical weekdays and typical weekend days is provided at the bottom of the table, demonstrating that the girls' perceptions of their own media use is quite high, with means of 8.9 hours per typical weekday and 15.9 hours on typical weekend days.

Table 5.11. Girls' total amount of media use and media use categories

Participant Name	Total Hours of Media Use on a Typical Weekday		Total Hours of Media Use on a Typical Weekend Day	
Kam	15.9	High	18.8	Average
JBear	7.9	Average	31.1	High
Crystal	13	Above average	17	Average
Hermione	5	Below average	8.7	Below average
Lizzy	10.9	Average	15.6	Average
Brittany Gomez	5	Below average	15	Average
Stacy McGuire	2	Below average	11	Below average
McKinze8	2.8	Below average	16.3	Average
Erica	14	Above average	22	Above average
Addie	5	Below average	7.7	Below average
Dawn Greensworth	21	High	27	High
Lovie	7.6	Average	9.7	Below average
Taylor	10	Average	16.5	Average
Michelle	1.6	Low	7	Low
Christina Morgan	27.5	High	39.9	High
Fish	3.1	Below average	8.2	Below average
Isabelle	6.7	Average	12.3	Average
Melody	8.4	Average	14.4	Average
Cupcake	5.5	Below average	11.1	Below average
Rose	1.4	Low	5.9	Low
Natasha	13	Above average	18.9	Average
<i>AVERAGES</i>	<i>Mean=8.9</i>	<i>Std. Dev.=6.7</i>	<i>Mean=15.9</i>	<i>Std. Dev.=8.5</i>

Finally, I placed each girl on a continuum of media use by averaging the two categories in which they fell (see Figure 5.3). For example, Kam's weekday media use was categorized as High, but her weekend day media use was categorized as Average, so she was placed in the Above Average area on the continuum.

In order to develop a more subtle manner of recognizing the differing modes in which audiences engage with media imagery as loci of connection between human bodies and mediated representations of them, I created a reception and interpretation typology identifying four distinct modes in which girls decode mediated images of women and girls. The goal of developing this typology is to demonstrate that preadolescent girls do not receive and interpret mediated imagery in a predictably uniform manner; the ways in which girls perceive mediated imagery are moderated by important differences between each girl in terms of both the quantity and the qualitative nature of her media consumption. In this typology, the continuum of media use intersects with a continuum of media criticism that ranges on the vertical axis from high to low. Scores on the media criticism axis were derived from a close reading of the girls' email diary entries from weeks two through six. Using the Critical Processing of Beauty Images Scale (Engeln-Maddox & Miller, 2008) as a rubric for identifying critical statements about the media images girls selected to examine in their email diaries, I coded each girl's email diaries for examples of critical or accepting statements about the appearance of women and girls in the media. The Critical Processing of Beauty Images scale includes three subscales (Engeln-Maddox & Miller, 2008, p. 171), which were found to have strong internal consistency and test-retest reliability:

- Fake subscale:
 - She's airbrushed.
 - They probably used computer re-touching to make her look like that.
 - That kind of perfection isn't real.
 - It takes a lot of camera tricks to make someone look that good.
- Questioning/Accusing subscale:
 - Images like that make women feel like they have to look perfect.

- Why do models have to be so perfect-looking?
- Images like that make women feel badly about themselves.
- Too Thin subscale
 - She should eat more.
 - She looks malnourished.
 - She's too skinny to be healthy.

In addition to the statements girls made that were similar to items in these subscales, I included critical statements about the amount of makeup worn by the woman or girl in the image and critical statements girls made about marketing ploys used to attract attention and sell products. Textual units coded as “statements” included both complete sentences and sentence fragments. Critical statements made in each diary about the presentation of women in the media were assigned a positive valence (i.e., +1 for one critical statement made in an email diary) and accepting or supportive statements about the depiction of women and girls in the media were assigned a negative valence (i.e., -2 for two accepting statements made in an email diary). Then, the scores for each girl’s diaries were averaged in order to determine the girl’s placement on the media criticism continuum; see Table 12 locating girls’ placement on the continuum and offering examples of their responses to specific media images provided in their email diaries. Because of the imprecision that would have been involved in coding statements based on the fervency of girls’ beliefs, this analysis considered the frequency rather than the strength of girls’ statements expressing criticism or acceptance of mediated portrayals of women and girls; therefore, although it is possible that a girl could have written just one statement per diary but believed it very strongly, this analysis coded the valence rather than the strength of girls’ critical and accepting statements in order to standardize the coding scheme.

The typology reveals four potential categories of interpretation, which are explicated in Table 5.12. and mapped out in Figure 5.3. As with any project examining the lived experiences of real people, not every girl fits neatly into a type; the girls closest to the intersection between the two continua in the typology are those who are not clearly categorized into a type and who are therefore labeled as being “weak” versions of each category in Table 5.13. In future, more quantitatively oriented research to refine this typology, larger samples should allow for greater specificity regarding typical amounts of media use, which should resolve issues of categorizing “weak” versions of each type.

Table 5.12. Explanations of each category of interpretation

Type	Media Use	Media Criticism	Definition	Key Examples
Protectionist (Quadrant 1)	Low	High	These girls do not consume large quantities of media content, but they express significant amounts of criticism toward the ways in which women and girls are portrayed in the media. Particularly with strong protectionists, this criticism seems to stem from their religious perspectives regarding women’s proper appearance, often charging women in the media with wearing too much makeup or dressing immodestly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rose - Cupcake
Jammer Girl (Quadrant 2)	High	High	Borrowing from the idea of culture jamming, or disrupting dominant readings of culture with subversive repurposing of cultural artifacts, Merskin (2005) defines Jammer Girls as girls “who are not taken in by those advertising messages that equate self-worth, value, popularity, and agency with conformity or purchase of the right product” (p. 56). Jammer Girls in this study seemed to relish the opportunity to solidify their critical perspectives toward mediated imagery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natasha - Christina Morgan - JBear

Table 5.12. (Continued) Explanations of each category of interpretation

Type	Media Use	Media Criticism	Definition	Key Examples
Targeted Audience (Quadrant 3)	Low	Low	Although these girls consume relatively less media than their peers, they do not seem to do so because they reject the media's depictions of women and girls. Instead, they uncritically consume relatively small amounts of media targeted at the Tween demographic, therefore making them the ideal target audience for advertisers and media producers seeking to increase their audience shares. They can be conceived of as "Preferred Readers in training."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Michelle - Stacy McGuire
Preferred Readers (Quadrant 4)	High	Low	These girls are the ideal consumers to advertisers and media producers, as they consume large quantities of media without levying criticism at the ways in which women and girls are depicted. In fact, Preferred Readers often express support of how girls and women in the media look and want to conform to and emulate their appearances. These girls interpret media images according to the dominant readings inscribed by media producers and advertisers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Erica - Crystal - Isabelle

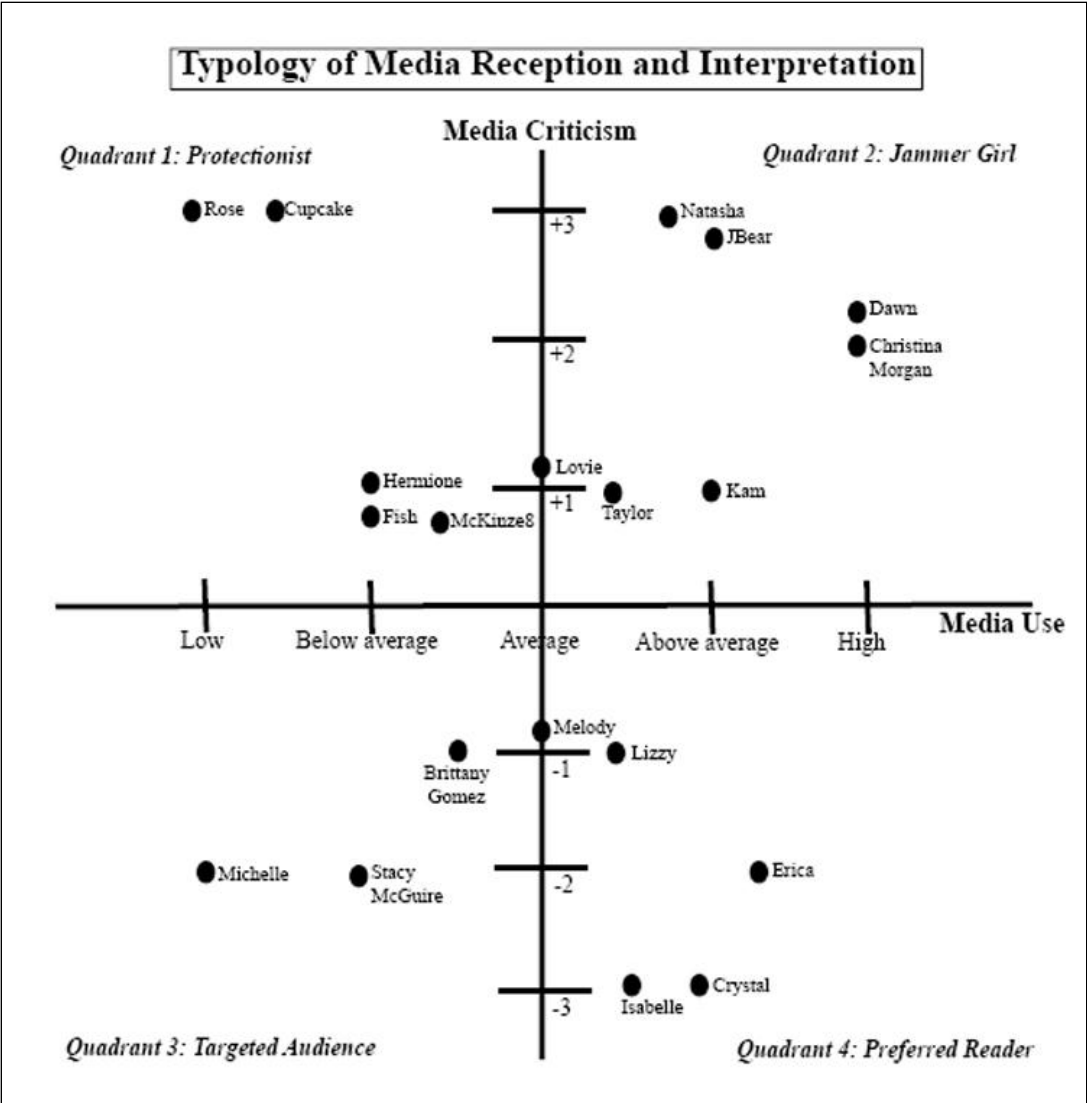


Figure 5.3. Illustration of the Media Use and Criticism Typology

Table 5.13. Average number and valences of girls' responses to media images in email diaries with exemplars

Name	Average number and valence of statements	Quadrant in typology	Examples of girls' responses to specific beauty images in the media from email diary entries
Lovie	+1	Weak Protectionist	- "I think they shouldn't wear makeup."
Taylor	+1	Weak Jammer Girl	- "They would need to age themselves and wear makeup to look more like that person [in the picture]."
Michelle	-2	Targeted Audience	- "Her life would change because in middle school (her grade) a lot of people want to be either her friend/boyfriend." - "Her life would change because she would make a lot of money. People would treat her differently because she is famous."
Christina Morgan	+2	Jammer Girl	- "So, sometimes, I've actually seen a magazine that was actually really offensive because it actually showed a picture of a pretty girl and a picture of an ugly girl, and it was really offensive." - To look more like this woman, a person would have to "get plastic surgery, change her name and her figure."
Fish	+1	Weak Protectionist	- About a picture of Lady Gaga wearing a dress made of meat, she thinks it is "shocking so you will be interested to try her music."
Isabelle	-3	Preferred Reader	- That picture of Selena Gomez "makes me feel like I should look like that." - "I was in the store and I saw a picture of Miley Cyrus and she was really pretty. She was wearing really pretty clothes and had a bunch of makeup on." - That picture of Katy Perry "makes me feel like I should look more like her and wear makeup like her."

Table 5.13. (Continued) Average number and valences of girls' responses to media images in email diaries with exemplars

Melody	-1	Weak Targeted Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Well, I guess it [the picture of Miley Cyrus] is trying to get people to watch the show. It kind of makes me want to watch the show."
Cupcake	+3	Protectionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keisha Cole in the picture is wearing "too much makeup. You don't always have to have makeup to be pretty." - If I could change this picture, I would "take off some of the makeup." - Girls who want to look like the woman in the picture "buy more clothes and makeup and brag about the new things they got or the new things they're getting."
Rose	+3	Protectionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Lots of pictures are clothing store advertisements." - "Most pictures try to sell stuff or to get the reader interested." - "I would make [the picture] more modest."
Natasha	+3	Jammer Girl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "They [viewers] try to look more like the tricked out figure and do unhealthy things to be a look-alike [to Selena Gomez in the picture]. I think they're trying to sell you a clothing product because she changed her style and most people follow in her foot steps and copy." - "They try and model different products to other women trying to sell them what they 'use.'" - "My mom says, 'You can watch this [America's Next Top Model], as long as you don't think you have to do this to your body.'"
Kam	+1 (Some critical statements canceled out by accepting statements)	Weak Jammer Girl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I don't talk much about people in magazines, because I know they like alter their body with like special effects and stuff and make them look so good that you think like their product worked. I think that I watched a YouTube video of someone actually doing it someone's face. Her face is like, bad, and they take everything off of it and they slim it up, brighten it, do something to her eyes and lips and everything." - The women in the picture "were very fat. I would make the person slimmer." - The woman in the picture "was so thin. She would probably grow up to be a model and have a lot of boys crushing on her."
JBear	+3	Jammer Girl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "The lady used too much make-up." - "The picture looked very unnatural. This picture is selling an album. I would change the unnaturalness of the picture."

Table 5.13. (Continued) Average number and valences of girls' responses to media images in email diaries with exemplars

Crystal	-3	Preferred Reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I do not think they are selling something because the girl was on the cover of the magazine and I wish I could be on the cover of a magazine. I wish I had those clothes and the girl's hair." - "I want to look like that girl because she is thin and I am thick and cute clothes. The hair looks really good." - "I wish that I had all the clothes and all the hair and the body."
Hermione	+1	Weak Protectionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I think this picture is trying to get you to watch the TV show. If I could, I would make this picture look more natural. I would try and make it look like she wasn't wearing too much makeup and she had bought her clothes at a normal store and that she had picked them out herself."
Lizzy	-1	Weak Preferred Reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If a girl looked more like an overweight girl in the picture, "it would make the girl sad because people would make fun of her because of her size." If she could change anything about the picture, "I would make her less chubby."
Brittany Gomez	-1	Targeted Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In response to a question about what the perfect girl looks like, she said, "Miley Cyrus."
Stacy McGuire	-2	Targeted Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I would like look at magazines and see if some people want to lose weight and now I want to lose weight." - "She is thin and I want to be thin like her."
McKinze8	+1	Weak Protectionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I cannot imagine me in makeup so I think I would look ugly." - When McKinze8 looks in the mirror to get ready for school, she thinks, "Wow, I'm really pretty!"
Erica	-2	Preferred Reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "She [Selena Gomez} looked soo pretty and I loved her outfit. The outfit definitely caught my eye. I now have this poster in my room." - "It [the picture] doesn't exactly make me feel good but it doesn't make me feel bad. I guess I am a little jealous. Not too much though."
Dawn Greensworth	+2	Jammer Girl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "We watch like little things, little videos, and once we had this one of a girl, she was like a size 1, and I said to my aunt, either she doesn't eat or she exercises every single second of the day." - "And also, all of those other jobs, they actually do stuff. When you're a just a model, you're just supporting clothes, that's it. And getting your picture taken."

The typology and its constituent categories described herein are not meant to be reductive, but rather to prompt questions about how girls' interpretations of mediated imagery are situated within their unique interpersonal discursive contexts, which may both support and undermine their readings of the media. Although factors related to interpersonal discourse surrounding body weight and appearance will be treated in more detail later, several illustrative cases bear mentioning here. For example, even though Michelle's mother reads the *American Girls Body Book for Girls* with her on a regular basis to facilitate conversation about body issues, one of Michelle's good friends wants to be a model, and their group of friends often compares the appearances of women in the media by flipping through a book of collaged images of models in magazines that her friend created. Therefore, although Michelle's mother engages her in supportive dialogue about girls' healthy development into adolescence, her peer network practices inscribed readings of media images in a group setting, which cultivates the less-critical attitude toward media images evidenced by her placement in the Targeted Audience category. Another example of the importance of interpersonal contexts is Dawn Greensworth, a Jammer Girl who voiced no shortage of critical sentiments toward mediated images of women. Although she adopts a very skeptical stance toward the media (see examples in Table 5.13.), Dawn battles diabetes and must vigilantly monitor her food intake and weight. Further complicating Dawn's relationship to her body is her mother's modeling of yo-yo dieting and habitual snacking. As a result of these intrapersonal and interpersonal influences, Dawn expresses dissatisfaction with her body and wants to lose 20 to 40 pounds, despite her critical attitude toward mediated imagery.

Although the examples above suggest that a critical attitude toward mediated imagery cannot be expected to fully inoculate girls against self-objectification, media criticism should

still be regarded as a promising opening for educators to intervene and disrupt body dissatisfaction discourses, as the variables related to girls' interpersonal discursive contexts are more difficult to address directly through educational programs and mass media campaigns. Additionally, unlike media use habits that are deeply ingrained into family patterns and routines and thereby more challenging to modify, media literacy is a skill that can be learned, practiced, and applied to media texts regardless of the amount of media the individual consumes. It is therefore possible through media literacy programming to increase levels of media criticism and move an individual from the Preferred Reader to the Jammer Girl type, offering a far more favorable opportunity for educational programming to facilitate positive change than attempting to alter families' media consumption habits. Media literacy programming will be considered in more detail in Chapter Eight.

What is Ideal? Curvaceously Thin vs. Just-Right

The preceding discussion of the types of media girls use and how they use them begs the question of what exactly the representations of women and girls presented in these media look like. In order to further explore these girls' experiences of their bodies formed through their interpretations of mediated imagery, this section will discuss how girls talked about what constitutes an ideal appearance and which media figures embody this ideal. If girls become bodies through a process of ongoing interaction with images, then it is crucial to explore what kinds of girlhood are reflected in the looking-glass of mediated imagery and why they identify with these representations. Also central to understanding this process of becoming bodies are the beauty and body maintenance practices girls consider necessary to produce the ideal body-image. Toward the goal of answering the question of which images of the ideal female body are most significant in the development of a self-objectifying

perspective, this section will discuss what girls describe to be the “just-right” ideal and the beauty practices they associate with achieving it.

The girls who participated in this study described the appearance of perfect girls and women in somewhat different terms than those used to define the curvaceously thin ideal that other researchers have previously identified as being the most prevalent in the postfeminist media environment and the most influential in terms of women and girls’ relationships with their bodies. In contrast to the curvaceously thin ideal that prescribes extreme thinness with the exception of a large bustline and seems to epitomize idealized femininity for adult American women (see Harrison, 2003), the girls in this study said that the perfect girl or woman has the “right” shape, which according to Taylor is “not underweight, not overweight.” Similarly, JBear said that the perfect girl is “not too skinny and not too fat, just like kind of in the middle of those.” Lizzy uses girls on TV as a barometer to assess the continuum of body weight; “sometimes I see like on TV, I see girls who are underweight and overweight, and I’m kind of in the middle.” The just-right ideal that participants aspire to represents a normative standard of body shape with very clear demarcations in terms of weight and clothing size. To Dawn Greensworth, any girl who wears below a size 5 clothing size is “skinny;” she and her friends “always make fun of the girls who are size 4 and lower, especially the adults.” Brittany Gomez also defines the appearance of the perfect girl in terms of her clothing size, saying, “She’d be like my sister, like a size 7, not a size 2.” Isabelle understands a good weight to be a “reasonable amount, not like too high or too low.” Therefore, the just-right ideal involves striking the perfect balance between being what Kam calls “unhealthy thin” and being overweight or “fat,” which girls associate with dire social and health consequences. Unlike the curvaceously thin ideal, which assumes that losing weight is always women’s goal, the just-right ideal deals with

thinness in relative terms, as girls who perceive themselves as being heavier than normal (e.g., Crystal, Dawn, and Christina) desire to be thinner and girls who perceive themselves as being thinner than normal (e.g., JBear and Taylor) desire to be heavier. The girls' preoccupation with resembling the body shape and size that is normal for their age highlights the centrality of "fitting in" to preadolescents, for whom peer acceptance is vital to both their body image and self-esteem.

According to the participants, a girl who has achieved the just-right ideal is also "pretty." Brittany Rose, Erica, Christina Morgan, Michelle, McKinze8, and Stacy McGuire all cite "being pretty" as a central characteristic of what the perfect girl or woman looks like. Importantly, girls associated being pretty with a very particular set of consumptive practices and behavioral habits, such as buying attractive clothes that match, using makeup, eating and exercising enough but not too much, brushing their hair, and having clear skin. Crystal said that the perfect girl has a cute outfit and great hair and does not have pimples, and McKinze8 said, "She would have like stuff that matched with her clothes. And she would just have pretty clothes and hair. And it would always be brushed." Kam said, "People who look really good have hair that isn't a huge mess, their teeth aren't really yellow, it's white. They're, um, their skin isn't all messed up." In every weekly batch of email diary entries, girls mentioned that in order to look more like the woman or girl in the picture, a girl would have to buy new clothes and accessories, wear makeup, change their hairstyles, and exercise and eat healthy. For example, in order to look more like the girl in the picture she had chosen to examine in her email diary, Michelle said that a girl would "wear makeup, have shiny hair, and buy clothes/accessories." To resemble actress Emma Watson, Melody said, "Girls put on more makeup, buy different clothes, get the same haircut [as the actress], and try to act differently." Isabelle thought that in order to look like Miley Cyrus, "Girls would wear lots of

makeup and buy really pretty and popular clothes. They will beg for stuff that they really want that is really cool.” Lizzy said that girls “try to look pretty so they exercise and eat healthy.”

Exemplary of the girls’ statements of support of and fascination with makeup, clothing, and grooming practices is Erica, who watches makeup tutorials that a young woman named Blair posts on her “juicystar07” You Tube channel in order to learn makeup application and styling tips. Of Blair, Erica said, “Sometimes I kind of wish I was her, because she’s really, really pretty and she’s really nice.” Also illustrative of girls’ desire to imitate the practices that women in the media engage in to achieve an idealized appearance is Crystal, who said, “When we get magazines in the mail, I say, ‘Oooo, Mom, look at her! I wish I could be her!’ and then she’s like ‘Oh, well, at some point you will, but now you’ve just got to try harder and do more exercise and eat less.’ That’s what I do now to be one of those girls in the magazine.” Likewise, Stacy McGuire said that in order to look more like actress Ashley Tisdale, “I would buy different clothes and wear makeup and different stuff.” These examples represent only a few voices in an overwhelming chorus heard throughout the email diaries indicating the centrality of beauty practices to attaining the prettiness mandated by the just-right ideal.

However, some girls expressed skepticism about using makeup in order to realize the kind of prettiness prescribed by the just-right ideal. For example, Isabelle said:

I do kind of want to wear makeup and stuff. But I think it should be, it should be sometimes not just always ‘picture makeup’ all the time...Cuz some of the pictures it looks like they’ve been in the bathroom for hours and hours, which is the way that my mom is every morning. And so I wish it kind of looked more, like, natural.

Although Isabelle was not willing to forgo the possibility of wearing makeup herself in the future, she is wary about adopting the time-consuming makeup application practices her mother performs in order to achieve a “picture makeup” look. The Protectionist girls were

less hesitant about voicing their suspicions about the mandate to participate in beauty rituals. For example, in almost every email diary entry, Cupcake expressed criticism of the makeup worn by women and girls in the media. When asked why she thought girls and women in the media wear so much makeup, Cupcake said, “so they can have more people that like them. So they can be more popular and more famous,” which to her is completely unnecessary and distasteful. Similarly, Rose observed that women in the media wear makeup “because people think makeup is pretty. The women try to look pretty. And like, all the hair product commercials make their hair look really perfect so that people will buy the stuff.” Therefore, the issue is not whether girls are aware of the consumptive practices and behavioral patterns required to emulate the just-right ideal, but rather the extent to which they understand these “technologies of the self” as mandates for the production of their own body-images. Participants’ degree of criticism toward the appearances of women and girls in the media as indicated by their placement in the media use and criticism typology seems to correlate directly with their acceptance or rejection of makeup use and other beauty practices. Protectionists and Jammer Girls express little desire to participate in such practices, and Targeted Audience girls and Preferred Readers generally accept the need to follow beauty maintenance rituals in order to attain prettiness (albeit with some reluctance in the case of Isabelle).

Disney Girls and the Manufacturing of the Tween Beauty Market

Considering the specific contours of the just-right ideal that preadolescent girls aspire to and its differences from conceptualizations of the curvaceously thin ideal that seems to be more salient to adult women, it becomes imperative to understand which media figures embody the just-right ideal in girls’ eyes. The photo collages girls created for this project offer an unvarnished view of who the girls in this study see as “the fairest of them

all” because in the main, participants used the creative freedom and productive tools afforded to them by the collaging task to reproduce images of the same commercially manufactured Tween starlets. The girls were simply instructed to create a collage of any women and girls they saw in the media in any way they chose; the photo collage task was designed to facilitate their unencumbered exploration of how girls appear in mediated imagery. However, with some important exceptions, the collages provide more evidence of girls’ use of Internet technologies to conform to normative expectations of the just-right ideal than pursue creative experimentation with images of young femininity.

This result had nothing to do with girls’ familiarity with and facility in using PowerPoint and the Internet. In fact, Kam, Christina Morgan, Brittany Rose, Erica, JBear, and Isabelle all self-identified as enjoying using computers for fun in their free time; Kam has her own You Tube channel where she posts videos she makes to enact stories from Pokemon anime; and Melody has created her own website. Additionally, almost every girl said during the debriefing interview that one of her favorite parts of participating in the study was the chance to create the photo collages. Only one girl elected to use traditional scissors and glue to create her collage, and the others seemed to relish the opportunity to experiment with the program, with some girls even reporting that they helped their parents put together PowerPoint presentations for work because they are more capable in using the software than their mothers and fathers.

During their debriefing interviews, girls typically reported that their processes to create the collages involved thinking of their favorite celebrities and then finding pictures of them on the Internet by using image searches. The celebrity girls that participants selected as their favorites and featured in their collages demonstrate the Walt Disney Company’s unparalleled success in manufacturing the Tween girl audience as a commodity to deliver to

advertisers seeking to reach preadolescent girls. Unfortunately, most reliable information about consumer behavior in relation to specific products such as Disney media content and merchandise is proprietary or very costly (Grier & Kumanyika, 2010). For example, it costs \$248 to purchase a PDF copy of the 2010 Youth Market Alert report entitled “Tween Sensibility, Spending, and Influence,” which includes detailed financial information about Disney’s marketing strategies and Tweens’ spending on cosmetics (EPM Communications, 2011). Therefore, it is very difficult to make accurate claims about Disney’s viewership and product sales to the Tween girl market. However, Disney celebrities dominate the relationships with media culture of participants in this study; the table below shows the frequency with which different celebrity girls appeared in the participants’ collages, and Walt Disney Company stars clearly rule the list.

Table 5.14. Frequency with which celebrity girls appeared in participants’ collages (n=15)

Name	Famous for her work in	Producer	Frequency
Selena Gomez	<i>Wizards of Waverly Place</i> TV show, music	Disney	11
Miley Cyrus	<i>Hannah Montana</i> TV show, music	Disney	8
Demi Lovato	<i>Sonny with a Chance</i> , <i>Camp Rock</i> movies, music	Disney	7
Taylor Swift	Music, friendship with Disney channel stars	N/A	6
Lady Gaga	Pop star (“Just Dance,” “Bad Romance”)	N/A	5
Emily Osment	Supporting role on <i>Hannah Montana</i>	Disney	4
Victoria Justice	<i>Victorious</i> TV show	Nick	3
Katy Perry	Pop star (“California Girls,” “Firework”)	N/A	3
Michelle Obama	First Lady	N/A	3
Miranda Cosgrove	<i>iCarly</i> TV show	Nick	2
Bridget Mendler	<i>Good Luck Charlie</i> TV show	Disney	2
Jennette McCurdy	Supporting role on <i>iCarly</i>	Nick	2
Emma Watson	<i>Harry Potter</i> movies (Hermione)	N/A	2
Zendaya Coleman	<i>Shake It Up!</i> TV show	Disney	2
Jennifer Stone	Supporting role on <i>Wizards of Waverly Place</i>	Disney	2
Ashley Tisdale	<i>High School Musical</i> movies, <i>Phineas and Ferb</i>	Disney	2



Figure 5.4. Lizzie's Collage. Counter-clockwise from upper-left) Selena Gomez, Brenda Song of the Disney show *The Suite Life on Deck*, Emily Osment, Jennette McCurdy, Alyson Stoner from Disney's *Camp Rock* movies, Demi Lovato, Lovato's co-star from *Sonny with a Chance* Tiffany Thorton, Bridget Mendler, and Ashley Tisdale.



Figure 5.5. Melody's Collage. Celebrities labeled.

Significantly, the most prominent celebrities, Selena Gomez and Miley Cyrus, are both starlets produced by the Disney Company, and girls often mentioned them in their initial interviews as examples of what the perfect girl looks like. For instance, when asked whether she ever compared her appearance to girls in the media, Melody responded, “I like Selena Gomez, and I wish I could be like her.” When asked the same question, Brittany Rose said that she compares how she looks to the appearances of older celebrities, like Selena Gomez and Miley Cyrus. The fact that Gomez and Cyrus are both 18 years old validates Cook and Kaiser’s (2004) notion that the Tween market is characterized by anticipatory enculturation to teenagerdom. As Zollo (1999) argues, children and adolescents tend to aspire upward with regard to age and emulate the lifestyles and behaviors of older children. For example, to reach Tween audiences, advertisers often use older teen actors with whom both younger children and older teens will identify. Preadolescent girls situated between girlhood and teenagerdom seek guidance from the popular culture pedagogies offered by Disney starlets in order to learn how teenage girls look and act to gain cultural currency and popularity. In fact, Crystal makes explicit the connection between the appearances of celebrity girls and popular girls at her school, saying that she wants “to get the weight off my body so that I would look like the girls in the magazines or girls at my school.” Given the centrality of these “Disney Girls” to what participants consider to be the benchmarks of success in the visual economy, this analysis will now provide background information about the “celebrated selves” (Weber, 2009) who command the gaze of the preadolescent girls in this study and around the country: Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, and Taylor Swift.



Figure 5.6. Michelle's Collage of Images of Selena Gomez

Selena Gomez, 18, makes \$25,000 per episode for her starring role in *Wizards of Waverly Place* (Schwartz, 2010) and is the founder and lead singer of the pop band *Selena Gomez and the Scene*. In October, 2009, Gomez announced her plan to launch her own fashion line, called “Dream Out Loud by Selena Gomez,” which was set to launch in fall 2010 (Joskowitz, 2009). In October 2008, Gomez launched her own production company, July Moon Productions, and partnered with XYZ Films to create star vehicles for Gomez. As part of the agreement Gomez will have the opportunity to be able to option articles, hire writers and create talent packages to shop to studios (Siegel, 2008). Gomez also dates Tween heartthrob Justin Bieber, who several girls in the study mentioned as being one of their favorite musicians.



Figure 5.7. Michelle's Collage of Images of Miley Cyrus

Miley Cyrus, 18, played Hannah Montana, the everyday girl with a double life as a pop star, until the recent finale episode of the eponymous TV show, *Hannah Montana*. She also tours the world as a singer and has appeared in multiple movies as Hannah Montana. Cyrus ranked at number 13 in *Forbes* magazine's list of the world's most powerful celebrities in 2010, earning \$48 million in 2010 and averaging a nightly gross box office of \$1.2 million per concert across 57 tour dates (Pomerantz & Rose, 2010). Girls in this study affiliated closely with Cyrus, to the extent that they described almost parasocial relationships with her. Michelle said that out of all of the celebrities she featured in her collage, "She's the one I've known for like, even from when I was younger, I knew her, like. And so whenever I think of her, it's kind of like I've known her for so long, even though I haven't met her in person. It feels like it! It feels like we're friends, kind of." Isabelle described feeling as though she had

grown up with Cyrus: “Because when we first liked Miley Cyrus, it was in kindergarten, and we are still, we still really like her. I think it’s because we were really young and we liked her, and so we’ve known her for really long.” Cyrus’s long-term presence as a fixture on Disney channel programming has therefore translated into participants feeling as though they have known Cyrus for their entire lives as media consumers, elevating Cyrus to a central position in the pantheon of Tween starlets.

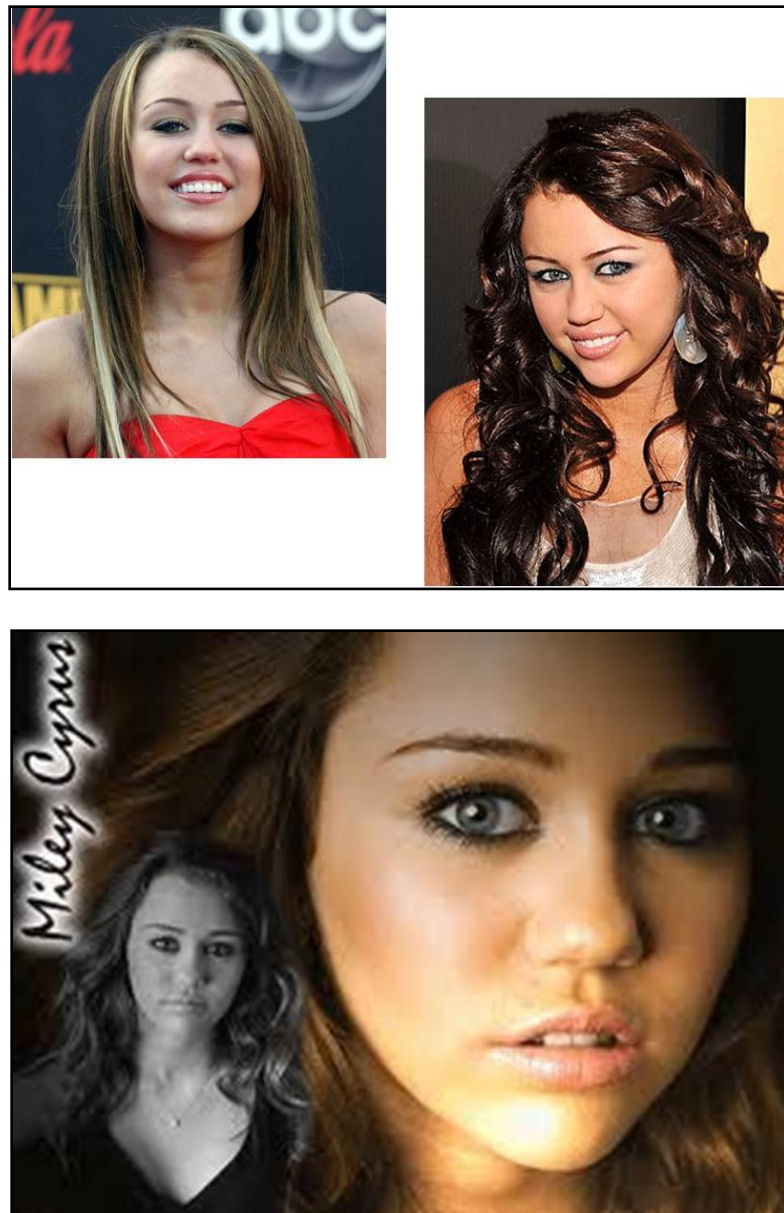


Figure 5.8. Isabelle’s Collage. Two slides of images of Miley Cyrus from Isabelle’s PowerPoint

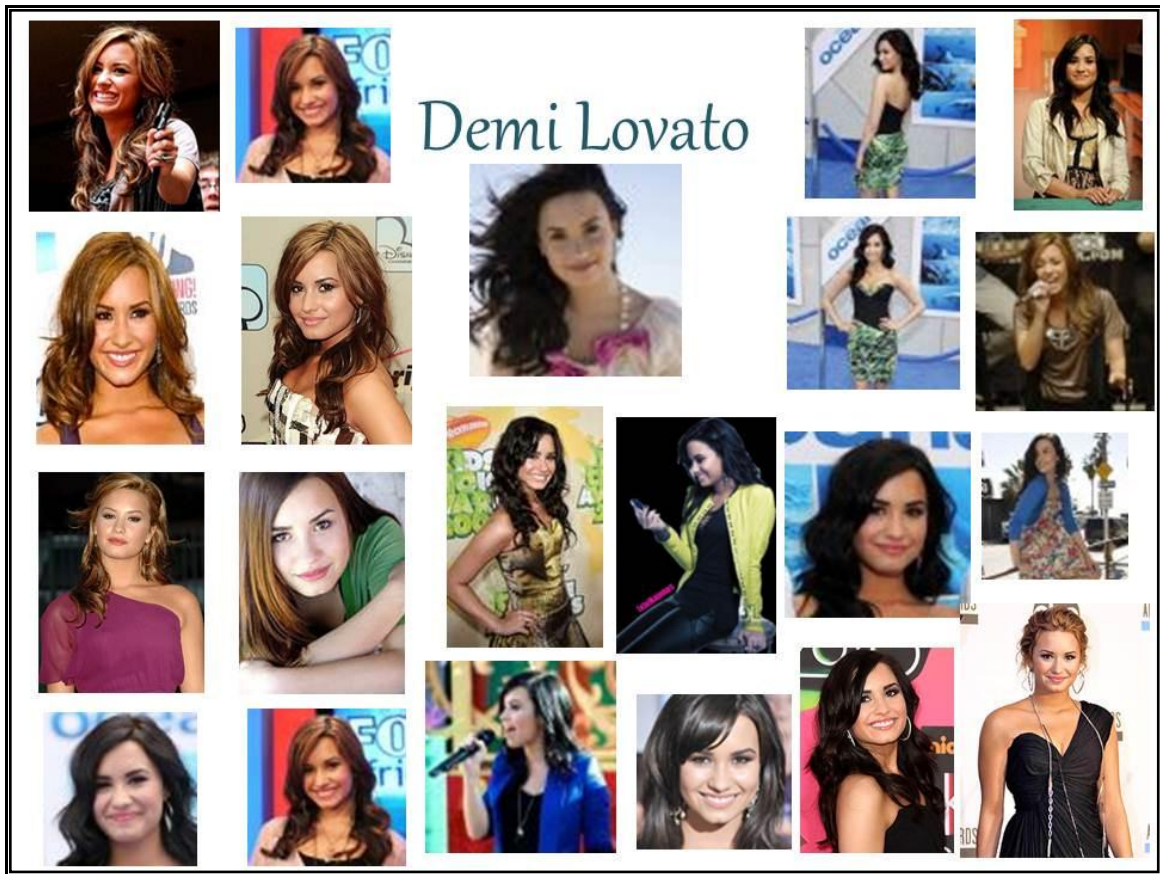


Figure 5.9. Michelle's Collage of Images of Demi Lovato

Demi Lovato, 18, makes \$12,000 per episode for her lead role in the Disney series *Sonny with a Chance* (Schwartz, 2010) and previously starred in Disney's *Camp Rock* movies. As a solo musical artist, Lovato's 2008 debut album, *Don't Forget*, debuted at #2 on the Billboard 200 and has since sold more 500,000 records in the United States and was certified Gold by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA, 2008). Lovato's second album, *Here We Go Again*, debuted at #1 on the Billboard 200 in 2009, selling 108,000 copies in the first week (Herrera & Caulfield, 2009). Lovato is also the face of mall proprietor GGP's "Shop Til You Rock" concert tours at 121 malls around the country. Lovato left her concert tour with the Jonas Brothers in November 2010 and checked into a treatment facility to deal with undisclosed "emotional and physical issues," finishing her stint in the treatment facility in January 2011 (Cotliar, 2011).



Figure 5.10. Michelle's Collage of Images of Taylor Swift

Although not technically a “Disney Girl” in that she does not star in TV shows or movies produced by the Walt Disney Company, Taylor Swift, 21, is associated with Gomez, Cyrus, and Lovato in the minds of participants because she is often photographed hanging out with the “Disney Girls,” has appeared in the Jonas Brothers and Hannah Montana movies, and dated Joe Jonas for a year. As of February 2011, Swift has sold more than 19 million albums and 33 million singles, making her the top-selling digital artist in history. Swift was named Nielsen SoundScan’s top-selling artist of 2010 based on her total album sales of 4.4 million, and in 2010, she made more than \$20 million (Billboard.com, 2011). In addition to her music revenues, Swift will launch a new clothing line for sale at WalMart in 2011 with LEI clothing, and she is the newest Cover Girl cosmetics spokesmodel.

It should be noted that Gomez, Cyrus, Lovato, and Swift have risen to prominence in the Tween market partially as the result of their ubiquity in all forms of media content Disney targets to Tween girls, including TV shows, movies, music, and promotional appearances. All four of these starlets are so-called “triple threats,” meaning that they have become famous for their work as singers, dancers, and actors. Disney regularly produces cross-promotional specials in which the casts of one show appear on another; Taylor mentioned a trilogy of cross-over episodes called “Wizards on Deck with Hannah Montana” in which the casts of *The Suite Life on Deck*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, and *Hannah Montana* came together in a merged story line. Also, these four celebrities are known by the participants to be friends in “real life,” as they are regularly photographed attending events together. The cross-promotion of these celebrities throughout multiple Disney media platforms as well as photography of the celebrities together while “off duty” serve to ensure that girls’ affiliation with them will be reinforced in every media format in which they are featured.



Figure 5.11. Michelle’s Collage of Images of Her Favorite Celebrities

The next-most frequently featured celebrity is Lady Gaga, who appeared in five of the participants' collages. Lady Gaga represents an intriguing media figure for the girls; although a couple of them (Crystal and Lovie) gravitate toward her avant-garde style, the other three girls who placed her image in their collages seemed to do so in order to illustrate a contrast to the normative just-right ideal, claiming that Lady Gaga uses “being weird” to get attention. For instance, Fish included a picture of Lady Gaga wearing the infamous “meat” dress in her collage because she had discussed it in one of her email diaries, in which she said that she thought Lady Gaga was “shocking so you will be interested to try her music” and that “people would laugh at her. It might smell and people would stay away from her.” Similarly, Cupcake said that Lady Gaga’s hair and makeup look “weird” and that if she could, then she would change her appearance to look like “a normal person.”



Figure 5.12. Fish’s Collage. See image of Lady Gaga in the meat dress at bottom right. From top-left counter-clockwise, Taylor Swift, Jennette McCurdy, Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift, Vanessa Hudgens of Disney’s *High School Musical* movies, Miranda Cosgrove, Lady Gaga, Emily Osment, Selena Gomez, Victoria Justice, Jennifer Stone, Miranda Cosgrove, and Emily Osment.

Fish's collage clarifies the distinction between the just-right ideal and Lady Gaga's deviant "weirdness," as Lady Gaga appears side-by-side with the girls Fish says are her favorite celebrities, Selena Gomez and Taylor Swift. These cases of girls policing the appearance of a celebrity who flouts normalcy indicates their keen understanding of the contours of the just-right ideal.

A final observation about who the girls selected for inclusion in their collages is that the three Black/African-American girls who created photo collages (Crystal, Cupcake, and Christina Morgan) seemed inclined to place images of strong Black/African-American women in their collages in addition to images of the Disney Girls and other Tween celebrities. Although Selena Gomez is half Mexican-American and half Italian-American and Demi Lovato's mother is Mexican-American, they seem to represent what Amy Hasinoff (2008) calls the "neutral brownness" of mixed-race media figures. This neutral brownness renders race to be superficially visible but politically and structurally invisible, transforming racial identity into a malleable commodity that can be manipulated in different marketing contexts. The neutral brownness of the Disney Girls does not seem to provide Black/African-American girls with satisfactory representations of how they aspire to look, as they supplement images in their collages of the Disney Girls with Black/African-American celebrities; Christina Morgan said that the Black/African-American women in her collage are "educational. Because they all have a simple reason in what they're trying to change for people and what they're trying to prove...The picture right here [of actress Angela Bassett] tells that we are strong and we can show it." This observation is in line with findings in the psychological literature (see Moradi and Huang's objectification theory model on page 9) that majority-minority cultural identity conflicts may moderate women and girls' internalization of the thin ideal (or for preadolescent girls, the just-right ideal).



Figure 5.13. Cupcake’s Collage. From top-left counter-clockwise, Selena Gomez, Raven Symone (above in her role in Disney’s *That’s So Raven* TV show and as a child in the *Cosby* Show), a gospel singer whose name Cupcake did not know, Emily Osment, Keke Palmer of Nick’s TV show *True Jackson, VP*, and actress Regina King.

In addition to informing the preceding explication of the identities of the girls and women featured in participants’ collages, the debriefing interviews using the ZMET allowed participants to envision who and how these celebrities are beyond the images captured in their collages. The ZMET facilitated participants’ exploration of the becoming of “celebrity” bodies and provided some very interesting insights regarding how they imagine the lives of these paragons of celebrated girlhood. The ZMET also brought out alternative readings of images of women in the media among Jammer Girls and Protectionists that emphasized traits beyond the embodiment of the just-right ideal.

Participants seemed to be well attuned to the nature of the moments in time and space that were captured by the images of their favorite stars. They clearly distinguished between pictures that were candid and casual and those in which the stars were posing for the cameras. Describing what is similar about the pictures of Selena Gomez, Ke\$ha, and Victoria Justice below, Lovie said they look “like the paparazzis aren’t all around them.” Lovie said that these three pictures are different because “these two [of Gomez and Justice] look they’re posing, but this one [of Ke\$ha] doesn’t really look like she’s posing.”



Figure 5.14. Lovie’s Collage. From top-left clockwise: Lady Gaga, Ke\$ha, Victoria Justice, Selena Gomez, Katy Perry, and Selena Gomez

When asked whether there were any photos she wanted to include in her collage but could not find online, Michelle responded, “Most of these are like photo shoots like at concerts. I wanted to try to find one that was out of that, not, just like them walking around....I couldn’t really find one. They’re mostly just from photo shoots.” Of the slide from her

collage below, Isabelle said, “I think that the one of Miley with the microphone [in the center of the collage at left], she was posing for the picture. And I think the one of her before [at right], she was more of, there was thousands of people, and she just picked one way [to look].”



Figure 5.15. Isabelle’s Collage. At left, a “posed” picture of Miley Cyrus. At right, an “event” picture where “she just picked one way to look.”

Interestingly, Isabelle said that both images of Cyrus depict her wearing “picture makeup,” which Michelle describes as when “you have to wear makeup because it looks good on the cameras and things.” JBear, a Jammer Girl, laments this state of affairs, saying, “They look unnatural because most of the time they have cheesy smiles. Their faces are all, they look like they have ten pounds of makeup on...I think they want to look all perfect. They want to be like an idol, and important.” Lizzy agrees, observing that celebrities wear “picture makeup,” special clothes, and well-coiffed hairstyles “cuz maybe their producers think if they’re not absolutely perfect, nobody will want to see the movie or buy the products.” Although many of the girls expressed a preference for more natural, candid pictures, they were well versed in the contexts in which images of their favorite stars are captured, easily distinguishing

between images derived from photo shoots, red-carpet events, and paparazzi snapshots.

Some participants also see these starlets' appearances to be aspirational for girls their age, motivating them and their peers to purchase products promoted by these celebrities. Isabelle and her friends give each other makeovers to look more like Selena Gomez and Taylor Swift, and she thinks that Cyrus's clothing line is very popular among girls her age; she said, "The brand Miley Max is similar clothes that she [Miley Cyrus] wears, and I saw the rack [at the store], it had like one skirt left! And it was like, there's like hardly any left. There is sometimes a full rack, but usually you can see that it's kind of picked over." In addition to selling apparel, stationery, music, dance videos, and electronic products (Manila Bulletin, 2008), Cyrus also promotes the Hannah Montana perfume. According to Rebecca Killian, senior vice president of creative and marketing for Boom LLC, the Disney Consumer Products licensee that develops the fragrances, thousands of Hannah Montana units are sold per week (Rose, 2008). Taylor Swift's new position as a Cover Girl cosmetics spokesmodel also portends of Tween's anticipatory enculturation into consumption of cosmetics and grooming products, a market that is forecasted to reach more than \$8 billion in the Tween segment by the year 2012 (Rose, 2008). The advertising copy of one of Swift's first print ads for the company announces that it is "introducing the next generation of beautiful!" laying bear the brand's intention to introduce a new generation of young consumers to Cover Girl through its promotion by one of their idols. Isabelle thinks if a person were to give one of her friends who "adores" Taylor Swift a thousand dollars, "I think she might spend it all on Taylor Swift stuff." Girls explicitly correlate appearance with socioeconomic status and ability to purchase products; Crystal explained that stars "get the stuff that they want...Like they have pretty clothes and pretty hair and shoes and they wear all kinds of makeup. Here, we just have clothes and shoes. Not the type of clothes they have."



Figure 5.16. Crystal’s Collage. A slide from Crystal’s photo collage depicting Selena Gomez. Conversely, women who appear “ugly” and deviate from the just-right ideal are seen by Kam as lacking the resources required for adequate self-care; of her slide entitled “Ugly People in the Media,” Kam said, “Probably this one has no money. That one probably has no money, neither does that one. Look at it! Eww! Can’t even tell what gender that thing is.”

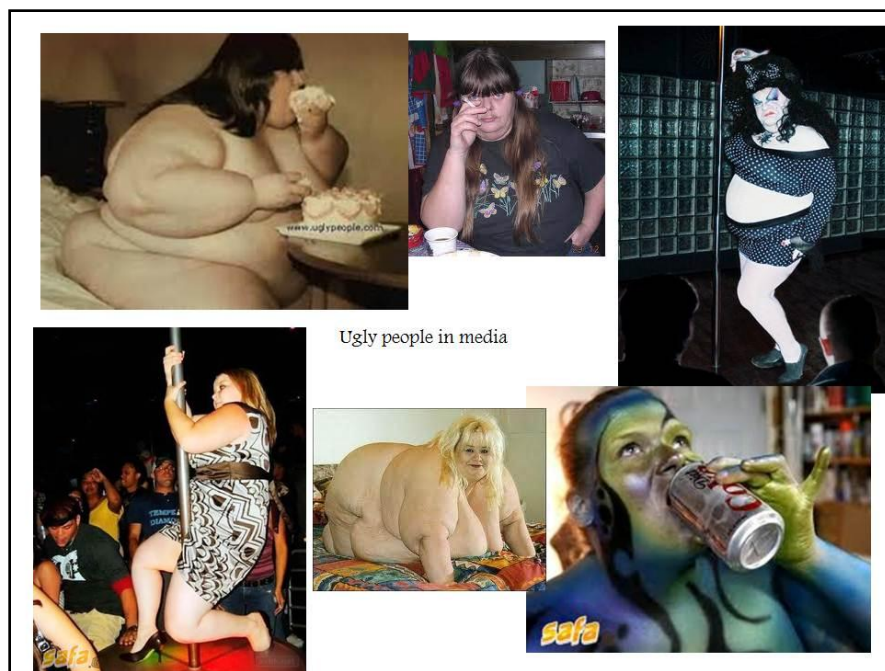


Figure 5.17. Kam’s Collage of Ugly People in the Media

In some participants' understanding of the becoming of celebrity bodies, financial resources are needed to access the products required to achieve the just-right ideal embodied by the Disney Girls. Evidently, these girls are not oblivious to the connection between what they saw as "perfect" images and injunctions to purchase beauty products and apparel.

Additionally, participants could clearly envision what it might be like for a girl to be as famous as Selena Gomez or Miley Cyrus, and their feelings about this lifestyle were very mixed. Some girls voiced envy, such as Kam, who said, "You'd have a lot of money and a lot of fans and a lot of good things in life. Like life would be so easy and happy." Isabelle and her friends want to learn how to become celebrities from their idols; "We want to meet them and see how they became famous and how we can become famous just like them. Because we want to be famous, too. Like, we made this video on my iPod where we're going to pretend like we're famous people." However, Michelle, Taylor, Melody, Rose, Lovie, Natasha, JBear, and Cupcake all thought that it would be difficult to be famous for a similar reason: that these celebrities are under constant surveillance by paparazzi and fans. Taylor thought that it would be demanding to be famous because "you might get bored of everybody around you. You might just want time to be alone."

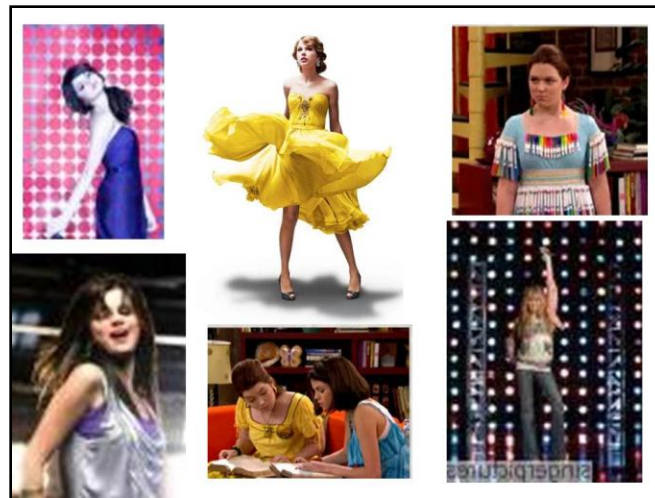


Figure 5.18. Taylor's Collage. From top-left clockwise: Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift, Jennifer Stone, Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez with Jennifer Stone, and Selena Gomez.

Michelle said, “They get used to a lot of people following them....I would be paranoid. Cuz you wouldn’t be able to have your privacy.” Melody also thought that fame would be tough to navigate, saying, “I think it would be kind of hard because there’s people all around trying to get to you. And um, you don’t know if somebody’s your friend or not.” Lovie observed, “Well, it would be kind of annoying because all of the fans are following you....It would be annoying because the bodyguard has to follow you everywhere you go.” Even girls like Isabelle and Crystal who expressed a desire to become famous perceived stardom as a double-edged sword; according to Isabelle:

Well, I think it would be hard and it would be fun, because probably you would have people outside of your house all the time, and there would be embarrassing pictures of you all the time in magazines, and there would always be a problem but it would always be fun, too. Cuz I got, I saw this one thing, it was Miley and Justin Bieber, and they went out for dinner, and then it said that they’re dating now. And so, that was like all over the Internet.

Similarly, Crystal thought that fame would be both fun and hard “because you get to tour the world. That’s what I want to do. And then it would be hard because people follow you and they could write bad things.” Natasha astutely noticed the precarious nature of fame, saying, “They’re probably trying to be perfect, too, because the media is all around them...Something might happen to take that all away.” In analyzing participants’ thoughts and perceptions of what it would be like to be their favorite celebrity, it is crucial to note that girls expressed feeling a mixture of attraction to and repulsion from the lifestyles of the rich and the famous. Although many of them idolize and follow the celebrities they pictured in their collages as fans, participants voiced reservations about subjecting themselves to the kind of surveillance and scrutiny that they see as accompanying celebrity status. The panoptic gaze of the paparazzi and fans closely resembles the notion of governmentality, in that celebrities must internalize the other’s gaze so that they can remain ever-vigilant over their appearances and actions, thereby anticipating the surveillance of paparazzi and fans.

Significantly, girls in this study describe celebrity as involving an intense form of monitoring by outside forces seeking to capture stars' every movement, and they associate starlets' embodiment of the just-right ideal with the relentless presence of the panoptic gaze, continually tracking and documenting their appearances and actions.

Encouragingly, images of Disney Girls and celebrated girlhood were not the only representations of women and girls created by participants. A handful of girls chose to depict alternative visions of how girls and women in the media appear by highlighting characteristics besides fame and normative ideals of beauty. McKinze8, a soccer player, idealizes soccer legend Mia Hamm and focused her entire collage on illustrating Hamm's storied career:



About Mia

- Mariel Margaret Hamm (born on March 17, 1972, in Selma, Alabama), best known as Mia Hamm, is a retired American soccer player. Hamm played many years as a forward for the United States women's national soccer team and was a founding member of the Washington Freedom. Hamm has scored more international goals in her career than any other player, male or female, in the history of soccer (158). She is the second most capped player in history.



Figure 5.19. McKinze8's Collage. A slide from McKinze8's PowerPoint photo collage about Mia Hamm.

Like McKinze8, Rose entirely eschewed images of the Disney Girls in her collage. A Protectionist, Rose's central concern was creating a collage that depicted women and girls who were dressed modestly and who did not wear too much makeup. Rose said, "It was hard to find pictures of women in the magazines that were modest. So what I did if it wasn't modest, I cut off the part that wasn't modest, like here [points to a picture of a woman whose headshot was cropped at the neck]."



Figure 5.20. Rose's Collage

Jammer Girl JBear created a photo collage that showed women and girls who were famous for a wide range of different activities, from the more conventional singers and actresses like Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift to scientists such as Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey, tennis player Serena Williams, first lady Michelle Obama, and female astronaut Pam Melroy. JBear's main criteria for selecting images was that they were "all all-natural and didn't have the

backdrops behind them. And they didn't have the names written on the bottom, because you could tell that was like, done in a studio. If they have 10 pounds of makeup on and there are lights shining all around them, it really shows up and you can really tell that it's not natural."



Figure 5.21. JBear's Collage.

JBear could vividly imagine what the lives of each of these women were like. Of Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey, JBear thought, "And they like, probably have a lot of good times with them [the chimps and apes] if they spend almost their whole life with them. I know Jane Goodall spent about 30 years with the chimps, so they must have really liked that, but it must have been tough for them to find food out there that was actually available to eat. You can't just go out and find pizza hanging on a tree!" Of Michelle Obama, JBear said, "It must be like, really tough, because she's the first lady and she has to do all of these important

things. And she's in charge of, I forget what it's called, but it's like, she goes to schools and she changes up what they actually serve, and it's to fight against obesity. So it must be really tough for her cuz she's second or third most important person in the U.S....She's like in charge of a lot of stuff that goes on around the White House, and she's got to keep up with everything. She's a leader in our world." In addition to only selecting images she perceived as being "all-natural," the common thread running through all of JBear's photo choices is that she imagined that each of their lives would be difficult because of their visibility in the public eye. JBear feels that fame is "not all it's put up to be," saying that "you wouldn't have to be famous to be important. I still feel important, and I'm not that famous!" JBear also wanted to be sure that the findings from her participation in the study included the injunction that girls should always "just be who they are," and they do not need "ten pounds of makeup" to do so.

Another Jammer Girl, Natasha, depicted several of the Disney Girls in her collage, but she chose to feature them not because they epitomized an idealized appearance to which she aspired, but because they are "the women in today's media that stand out, inspire and influence me. They show model behavior and enthuse [sic] me to do great things every day." The women Natasha selected for her collage are those she sees as exemplary role models for young girls in terms of their conduct and behavior, not their looks. For example, when explaining why she selected to feature Taylor Swift alongside other Disney Girls in her collage, Natasha said, "I think of her as a strong woman who has a good career in music. I think of her as a good woman, a good person, nothing bad ever comes to mind when I look at most of these women. They're never embarrassed to do what they feel is right."

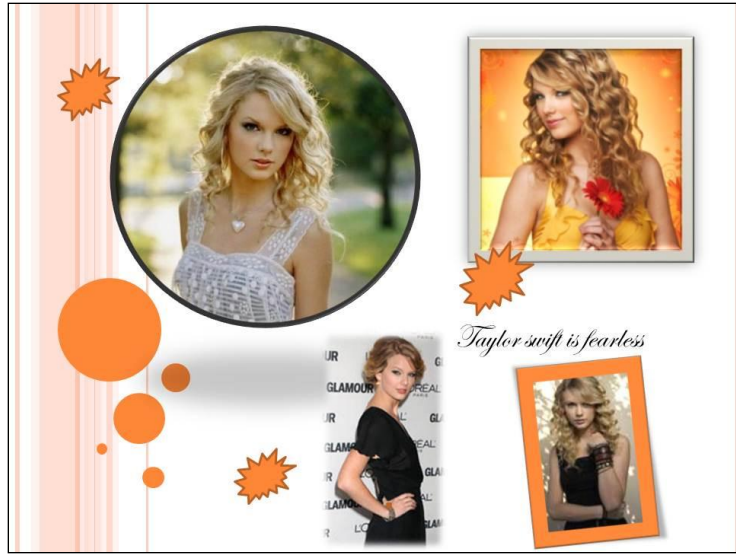


Figure 5.22. Natasha's Collage of Images of Taylor Swift

Natasha also highlighted the stars of Disney's new series, *Shake It Up!*, as she considers their style of dress to be more distinctive and individualized than the picture-perfect celebrities she sees on other Disney Channel shows. Natasha described one episode of the show in which the main character, played by Zendaya Coleman, "tried to change her look to make people like her, but she ended up seeing that everyone liked her for who she was. I think their style is more unique because it's just pieces of fabric, of things they throw together that's never like anyone else's in different series that I watch...And the hairstyle and the similar clothing is what I see a lot [in other Disney shows]."



Figure 5.23. Natasha's Collage of Images from *Shake It Up!*

The actions and words of women and girls in the media are as relevant to Natasha as how they look; she emphasized that a picture only captured a single moment in time, but what really matters to her is who and how celebrities are beyond the frame of the camera lens:

I've learned [through participating in this study] that pictures can't always describe what they [women and girls] do. You watch them and study them and make sure that one little picture doesn't affect the whole career or the way their image is set out....I've never really noticed people in the media. They were just people. And now I've looked and researched and seen how they're really all connected and how they really are people who influence us. They're not just people you see dancing or singing in an album or on TV...I loved researching. I love everything that I got to do and show what I could do.

The collaging project seemed to provide Natasha with an opportunity to explore the process of becoming of a celebrity body, and she came to a nuanced understanding of the role she perceives celebrity women and girls to play in her life and those of her friends.

A final Jammer Girl whose collage merits analysis is Christina Morgan, who chose to use her collaging project to portray a vision of women and girls that the media overlook. Christina's expressed purpose in creating her collage, which she entitled "My Women/Girls/Babies Collage," was to "show how every single girl in this picture is different from the other girls in the picture." Each slide in Christina's PowerPoint featured women of different ages, races, and body shapes, as Christina felt frustrated that magazines and other media limit the diversity of women and girls she sees represented: "They [the media] just show girls who are ordinary...how she can be pretty and stuff, but they actually don't show the girls who are different and who could be ugly and stuff. They don't really show that."

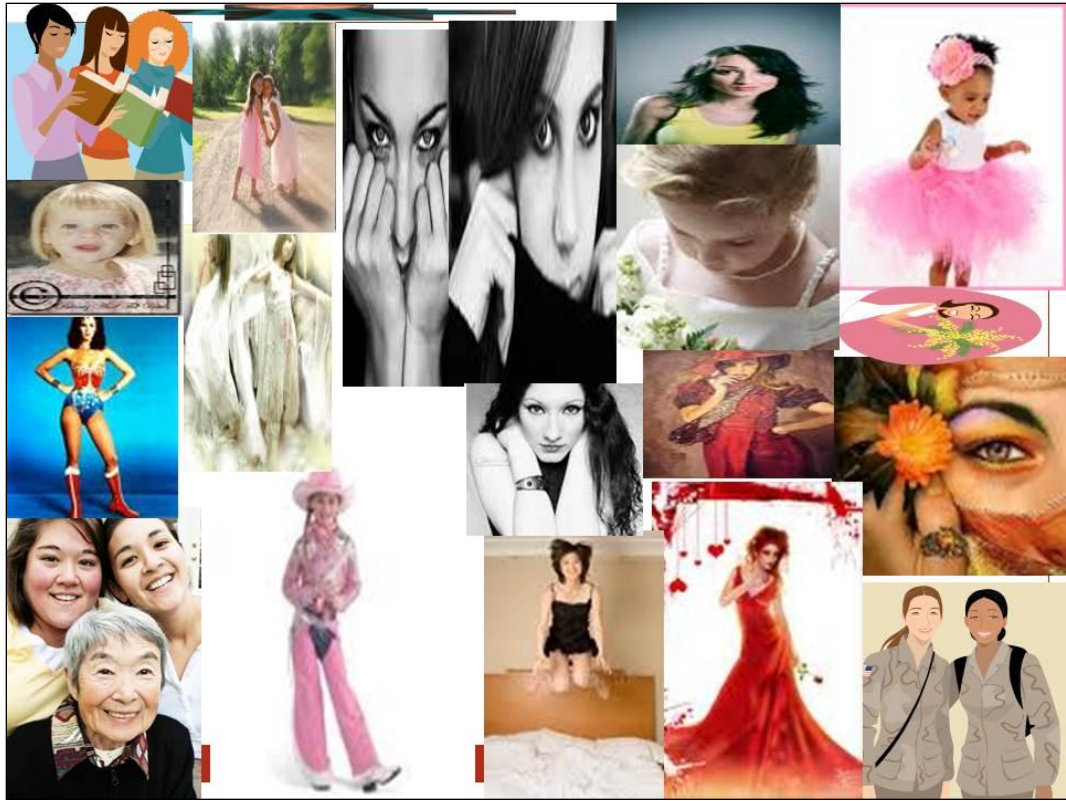


Figure 5.24. Christina Morgan's Collage of Women, Girls, and Babies

Although during her initial interview for the study, Christina expressed feeling as though she needed to lose 70 to 80 pounds, during the course of the study and through her critical, creative analysis of mediated imagery of women, she came to a new understanding of herself and comfort with looking different from other girls at school who had teased her about her weight:

Well, actually it [being in the study] did kind of have a big impact on me because talking about it in my diaries and then actually doing my collage, it changed. Because how people were teasing me, because how I was bigger than them, I kind of didn't really worry about that anymore, because they, I mean, even though I look different than them, I'm not different. So I really didn't care about what they were saying. I kind of just ignored what they said. It actually had a really big impact on it.

Christina arrived at this acceptance of her body and hunger to see a diversity of women represented in the media of her own accord, as the email diary questions and collaging task did not involve any specific media literacy pedagogies besides simply asking girls to write about and illustrate how they viewed women and girls in the media. And yet, through her own creative sensibilities and thoughtfulness, Christina learned, "Don't judge book by its cover. Like, don't judge girls by the outside. Actually get to know them first before you do." The responses of Christina and the other Jammer Girls to the collaging task suggest that fostering girls' engagement in media criticism can help them explore the interactions between body and image that constitute the process of becoming bodies, giving them permission and creative space to question what kinds of women are omitted from the media's narrow conception of celebrated girlhood and to consider what the lives of these idealized girls are like beyond the moments in time captured by the camera. Questioning the practices and lifestyles associated with becoming a celebrity body is a first step toward challenging the validity and desirability of attaining the just-right ideal that the Disney Girls represent.

In conclusion to this chapter, the reasons that the pervasive just-right ideal and the Disney Girls who embody it are problematic merit reiteration. First, as evidenced in participants' discussion of what the "perfect girl" looks like, the just-right ideal prescribes rigidly defined standards of body shape and "prettiness" that limit girls' perceptions of what it means to look like a "normal girl." Although it might be comforting to assume that because girls do not necessarily aspire to the "curvaceously thin ideal" they are less susceptible to body dissatisfaction, girls' adherence to the delimitations of the just-right ideal must be policed with equal vigilance and discipline, lest they suffer the social and physical penalties they attribute to failing to achieve the just-right ideal described in the following chapter. If the curvaceously thin ideal is considered to be metaphorically demarcated by two hash marks placed together closely at the extreme end of the body-weight continuum, then the just-right ideal can be seen as two hash marks with a similarly narrow distance between them placed slightly closer to the midpoint of the continuum. In other words, the curvaceously thin and just-right ideals are similarly restrictive; the only difference is which body weights their narrow delineations define as normative.

Second, the prettiness mandated by the just-right ideal demands consumerism and the anticipatory enculturation of preadolescent girls to adult beauty practices and purchases, from cosmetics and clothing to hair styling and skin treatments. Participants understood that attaining the prettiness personified by the Disney Girls requires the use of beauty products, and several participants already actively experiment with makeup by performing "makeovers" on their friends to emulate the appearances of their favorite celebrities. Finally, the just-right ideal embodied by the Disney Girls models self-surveillance and self-objectification, as participants' imagination about what it might be like to be famous centered on how the panoptic gaze of the paparazzi and fans trained upon the Disney Girls

must constrain the lives of their favorite celebrities. For the participants, achieving celebrity girlhood status is closely connected to being monitored and gazed upon by fans and foes alike. Girls read into celebrities' experiences a sense of fatigue with coping with constant surveillance, an exhaustion they appear to project onto these celebrities based on their feelings about the body monitoring they engage in within their own interpersonal contexts, which is described in the following chapter. Promisingly, though, girls who expressed greater levels of criticism toward mediated imagery of women and girls also expressed less interest in participating in beauty rituals and more resistance toward measuring one's worth through appearance alone, which bodes well for the potential of media literacy programming and curriculum to empower girls to redefine the just-right ideal to encompass a broader range of body shapes and styles of dress and appearance.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS REGARDING SELF-OBJECTIFICATION AND BODY SURVEILLANCE IN GIRLS' EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES

Having examined the dimensions of the just-right ideal and how participants interpret mediated images of this ideal, the analysis will now consider the benefits that participants that associate with attaining this normative ideal and the risks and punishments they anticipate from failing to achieve it. Addressing this issue marks a crucial pivot-point in the analysis, as the focus will shift from studying girls' readings of media imagery and texts to observing how girls incorporate these readings into their perceptions of their bodies, everyday interactions, and social contexts. This chapter speaks to the next stage in the objectification theory framework – how girls experience self-objectification and body surveillance – because the benefits derived from achieving the just-right ideal and the risks associated with failing to do so pertain directly to the ways in which girls monitor their appearances and assess how others perceive them.

The Perceived Consequences Associated with (Failing to) Attain the Just-Right Ideal

The participants in this study linked very tangible benefits to the achievement of the just-right ideal by girls and women in the media. In their email diaries, girls were asked to discuss what would happen if a girl looked more like the woman portrayed in the picture they had selected to analyze and whether her life would change. Of a girl pictured in a magazine, Michelle said, “Her life would change because she would make a lot of money. People would treat her differently because she is famous.” Isabelle thought that if a girl were to look more like a depiction of Miley Cyrus, “her life would change totally because she would look so pretty and maybe even famous, so she would probably be swarmed by a bunch of people.” According to Michelle and Isabelle, the just-right ideal affords both monetary and social currency, as Michelle imagined that a girl portrayed in a magazine would

profit from her good looks and Isabelle supposed that a girl who looked like Miley Cyrus would be surrounded by adoring fans thanks to her attractiveness. In her critique of an image of a woman she perceived as wearing “too much” makeup, Cupcake thought that “her life would change. People would treat her more differently than anyone else. They would give her more things and they would treat her really nice by doing what she asked.” Of an image of a glamorous woman that she had selected to examine in her email diary, Kam opined that “she would probably grow to be a model and have a lot of boys crushing on her.” Both Cupcake and Kam felt as though a woman or girl who subscribed to beauty practices such as wearing makeup and “fancy” clothes would be rewarded with subservience from those around her and attention from boys. Here, it must be noted that girls in the study typically associated approval from boys with acceptance and social capital within their social circles because girls with boyfriends are seen to be more mature and popular than their peers; none of the girls discussed having had a boyfriend at this age. Erica believed that a girl who looked more like a picture of Selena Gomez that she had chosen to focus on in her email diary “would maybe become more popular or feel better about herself. She might be a happier person from then on out.” In this way, Erica translated the social approval and popularity a girl would gain from looking like Selena Gomez into higher self-esteem and greater happiness.

However, if girls perceived the image they selected to examine in their email diaries to represent a “regular” girl like themselves rather than an icon of celebrated girlhood, then they did not seem to think that a girl’s life would change if she looked more like the woman in the picture. Of a girl picture on the Girl’s Life website, Michelle said, “This girl’s life would not change. Because she is a regular girl like me and the rest of my friends.” In considering an image of a girl who was not wearing makeup, JBear thought that “no one

would be treated differently by people.” Similarly, Lovie did not think that looking like a picture of a girl on the beach with her dog would change anything about the life of a girl who looked more like her. Participants’ distinctions between women who looked like “regular” girls and women who embodied the just-right ideal by wearing makeup, styling their hair, and sporting fashionable clothes illustrate the contrast between the rewards associated with achieving the just-right ideal and the normative treatment that “regular” girls receive in their daily lives.

Although understanding girls’ interpretations of how celebrities benefit from attaining the normative ideal of beauty is instructive, it is only through eliciting information from girls about the ramifications of others’ judgments of their appearances that we can begin to understand the prevalence of body surveillance in their everyday experiences. Two participants regularly encounter harassment from peers based on their body shapes; Crystal is teased for being what her peers at school perceive as larger than the just-right ideal, and JBear is teased for being what her peers at school perceive as smaller than the just-right ideal. As Crystal describes her harassment, “I wish I could be thinner so that people wouldn’t talk about me no more and so that I could look good and wear my clothes and not like another type of size... They say, ‘Look at her and how she looks.’” Even though she is tormented for being what her peers perceive as too thin rather than being too heavy, JBear’s description of her harassment by peers resonates with Crystal’s:

Sometimes I wish that I could be a little, I could have a little more meat on my bones...One time, during school, I was running laps around our track because I have to run two laps before I can go out on the playground, and um, this big group of girls came over and they grabbed me, and they grabbed my arms, and they started saying ‘Look how skinny she is!’ and they started making fun of me.

In this way, the discursive contexts of JBear and Crystal's social networks reinforce the influence of the just-right ideal, redoubling its authority in the girls' media and interpersonal environments.

Although from JBear's experience, it is apparent that some girls are ostracized for being thinner than the just-right ideal, the most pernicious punishments are linked to being heavier than the just-right ideal, as girls perceive both physical and social consequences to result from overweight. Several of the participants have learned about the health problems related to obesity from their health and physical education teachers, such as Michelle, who said, "I don't want to be overweight... because like what I learned in PE class, a lot of people who are overweight, they don't have as long of a life. They can get like sicknesses like diabetes easily." Kam also observed that being overweight could pose challenges to exercising, stating, "If you see fat people try to do things that is a lot about athletics, they kind of tend to stop earlier and have trouble doing things... They can't do things that other people can." Brittany Rose's perceptions of the health complications resulting from overweight are even direr; she said, "If you're too overweight, you can die from it." For some girls, then, the stigma associated with being overweight stems from an aversion to the health problems associated with obesity that they have learned about through direct observation and from school health curricula.

However, for more participants, the negative consequences linked to being overweight are far more social than physical in nature, as girls perceive those who are overweight as being subject to intense scrutiny, judgment, and appearance-policing from their peers. Melody poignantly describes the social stigmatization from which she perceives overweight students at her school to suffer when she explained that she does not want to be too overweight "because, um, it's harder to be yourself and people could judge you and you

can't do all of the things that you would want to do... They [other kids] just, they're not really their [overweight kids'] friends as much as they could be. And uh, they don't get to, like, have as many opportunities as some people." In this way, Melody makes explicit that the judgment levied against overweight children at her school prevents them from fully participating in social life and other activities. Several of the girls related stories of kids at their school who had been ostracized because of their weight; of overweight students at her school, Christina Morgan said that other kids are "mean to them, and they don't treat them very nice." Lizzy thought, "People would probably like them [overweight kids] if they lose weight... One girl is like really, really tall, and she's a little overweight, and some people don't really like her." Kam worries about being overweight "because people often make fun of you when you're like that... There used to be one of my other friends who would get made fun of because of her smell and her weight... It was often behind her back but every now and then she caught one or two of them." Stacy McGuire simply said, "I don't want to be fat. I want to be thin, like everybody else." Stacy's comment reiterates the importance to preadolescent girls of achieving and maintaining a normative body shape, as stigma among one's peer group results from failing to look like "everybody else." As per Russ's (2008) observations about the multiple levels of body dissatisfaction discourse – intrapersonal, interpersonal, and mediated – that permeate American culture, the social consequences connected to overweight reinforce mediated messages and imagery valorizing the just-right ideal as preordained and serve to enforce the cultural mandate that being overweight constrains one's ability to experience a full and happy social life.

Girls' Perceived Audiences for their Body Projects

Based on the preceding discussion, the participants in this study realize that their bodies are not entirely their own. In the context of their social environments, where girls

receive rewards and punishments based on how they look, girls come to comprehend that “the female body is not private: it is a social body on which anyone can comment” (Russ, 2008, p. 15). Given the very real social consequences girls perceive as resulting from failing to achieve a normative body shape and appearance, it makes sense from a psychological perspective that girls might begin to self-objectify and preemptively monitor their appearances, as they anticipate people in their social contexts will do. Therefore, it becomes crucial to identify whose gaze girls internalize and train upon themselves; in other words, to restate the original research question, who do girls perceive the audiences for their body projects to be?

In order to answer this question, it is instructive to examine participants’ reference points for body comparison in everyday life as a means to understand how girls serve as audiences for other girls’ body projects. The analysis of participants’ photo collages and how they manifested the just-right ideal demonstrated that girls compare their body projects to those of the Disney Girls and other idealized women in the media; for instance, Brittany Rose said that she compares herself to Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez, Melody compares herself to Gomez and Demi Lovato, Michelle expressed that she compares how she looks to how models look, and Isabelle said that she and her friends compared how pretty they look with the character of Bella when watching the movie *Twilight Eclipse*. As noted previously, participants seem to use the popular culture pedagogies offered by the Disney starlets as templates for how “popular” girls look and act to gain social currency. Crystal explains that she compares herself to women in the media “because they look like the people at my school because they’re thin and they look good.” In this way, mediated representations of women and girls who embody the just-right ideal function as the standard by which to assess the appearances of “regular girls.”

When asked who they compare themselves to when they compare how they look to how other people look, participants typically indicated that, in addition to comparing themselves to the Disney Girls, they compare their appearance to other girls at school who they perceive as being thinner and better dressed than they are. Dawn Greensworth compares herself to “girls at my school that are skinny and average height.” Brittany Gomez said that she compares how she looks “to my class. Cuz, like, my friends, well, some people in my class are *really* skinny, and then the rest are like me, just normal.” Similarly, Melody said that she compares her appearance to those of her friends, stating that she wants to be “thinner a little bit, yeah, just thinner” so that she looks more like her friends. Fish and Michelle also remarked that they compare their appearances to those of their friends and other girls at school. Lizzy and Isabelle specifically mention the names of friends to whom they compare themselves; Isabelle said:

Well, sometimes I think about being skinnier, because two of my friends, Erin and Cindy. Cindy, *when*, she’s the most boniest person I’ve ever met. She barely eats anything. Her dad can go like that (puts her fingers in a circle) around both of her wrists put together. And so, it just like makes me feel, *when!* Like *eeeh!* And Erin isn’t that skinny, but still she’s like really small and skinny. So, sometimes [I want to look more like them].

Isabelle’s story exemplifies the ways in which girls can serve as audiences for each other’s body projects in that she not only assesses her own weight in relation to Erin and Cindy’s but also monitors the quantity of food her friends eat in order to maintain their thin frames. Although participants seem to indicate that these kinds of body comparisons are closely related to their quests for achieving a normative appearance that will ensure their social acceptance, girls’ tendencies to monitor their peers’ body shape and weight also serves a surveillance and disciplinary function, as girls who do not adhere to the just-right ideal are ostracized and excluded from friendship groups. To invert the idiom “judge not lest ye be judged,” girls judge as they know they will be judged.

Considering the performativity inherent to girls' experiences as social bodies, the school context can be seen as the stage upon which girls present their body projects for approval by their primary audiences: their female peers. When asked about what their thoughts are like when they worry about how they look to other people, participants often inscribed their classmates at school as audiences for their body projects; for instance, JBear related the following story about how her friends at school would judge her appearance:

I worry about that [how I look] a lot, because sometimes I wear clothes that look really weird on me, like a really baggy shirt and some tight jeans, and it might look a little weird on me, and I feel like 'Oooo, my friends aren't going to like this' and I just don't feel good about it sometimes. Like, at the beginning of the school year, my mom bought me a shirt with pink flowers all over it that looked like a little kid had drawn them because the petals were all swirly. And I haven't worn it all year, I haven't even taken the tag off it or taken it out of my closet cuz I feel like people would make fun of me if I wear it.

Similarly, when worrying about how she looks in her friends' eyes, Melody wonders, "Do I look OK? Do they think I look OK?", and Christina Morgan said she worries about looking good to other people at school. Specific settings in the school environment, such as the playground and the girls' restroom, seem particularly conducive to appearance comparisons. McKinze⁸ explained that she worries about how she looks to other people at recess because she sees students from the entire school, not just her classmates, there; "I'm like, 'Is she really pretty and am I really pretty to her?' and I wonder if she thinks I'm really pretty." Brittany Gomez described how girls in her class crowd around the mirror in the girls' restroom while on bathroom breaks to double-check the appearance of their makeup and clothes as well as to offer compliments and comments on other girls' appearances. Erica provides an illustrative example of the extent to which body- and appearance-surveillance can occupy girls' attention and cognitive resources; she said that worrying about how she looks to other people while she is at school or in any public place is "pretty much all I worry about. I worry about it often. Probably when I'm just around people in general." While in

public, Erica feels as though “I have to make sure I looked good, cuz I didn’t want to look bad in front a lot of people that would probably be seeing me and looking at me.” The stories and insights shared by participants indicate that if girls’ body projects can be seen as performances, then school environments often function as the stage, and their female friends and classmates serve as their primary audiences, suggesting that girls may translate the mass-media panopticon into personal terms.

This finding runs counter to current books by psychological researchers and women’s advocates written for popular audiences that claim the media’s “sexualization” of girls encourages girls to be preternaturally concerned with attracting boys’ attention. Including *The Lolita Effect: The media sexualization of young girls and five keys to fixing it* by psychologist M. Gigi Durham (2008), *So sexy so soon: The new sexualized childhood and what parents can do to protect their kids* by education scholars Diane Levin and Jean Kilbourne (2009), and *Cinderella ate my daughter: Dispatches from the front lines of the new girlie-girl culture* by acclaimed women’s issues journalist Peggy Orenstein (2011), the books giving voice to the latest “girlhood crisis” argue that mediated representations of girlhood not only function as anticipatory enculturation to adult beauty practices (which is confirmed in this study) but also foster a premature interest in pleasing the opposite sex, contending that kids are having sex younger and with more partners than ever before in part as the result of their emulation of the media’s sexualized depictions of women and girls, a claim this study disputes. Although preoccupations with the male gaze may come to predominate after puberty (an assertion that is beyond the scope of this study to address), the insights of participants in this project demonstrate that preadolescent girls’ perceived audiences for their body projects are *not* typically boys, but rather friends and other girls in their school environments; their motivations for pursuing compelling performances of the just-right ideal have more to do

with gaining social approbation from other girls than attracting boys' sexual attentions. In the visual economy of preadolescent girls, social rather than sexual currency is the coin of the realm. These "girlhood crisis" books therefore can be seen to represent a misinformed reading of girls' performances of idealized femininity that is influenced by adult anxieties about what beauty practices and body concerns signify to adults rather than an accurate assessment of how body projects and the consumptive practices and self-objectifying attitudes associated with them operate within girls' culture and social contexts. Tellingly, none of these three books relies on data gathered from actual interactions with girls, such as interviews or focus groups, but instead base their conclusions on the authors' analysis of media texts and how they might influence girls, thereby emphasizing the power of the encoder of media messages over the decoder and negating the possibility that girls could receive these messages in different ways. Based on the findings of this study, the media's sexualization of girls should be reconceptualized as priming girls' socialization into the body dissatisfactions and anxieties, not the sexualities or gender relations, characteristic of adult American culture.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS REGARDING GIRLS' INTERPERSONAL DISCURSIVE CONTEXTS

Discussing Body Issues with Family and Friends

The analysis will now consider girls' interpersonal discursive contexts related to topics of weight management, dieting, and exercise. Because none of the participants have experienced anything resembling an eating disorder and only a couple of girls have experimented with dieting, it is more helpful to understand how girls talk with significant members of their interpersonal networks about dieting and exercise than to attempt to classify instances of body shame, body anxiety, and eating disorder symptomatology described by girls during their interviews. By examining the ways in which girls talk about their feelings about their bodies and images of women/girls in the media with their families and friends, the analysis will demonstrate how the body surveillance described in the preceding chapter becomes manifest in girls' body-related communication within their interpersonal networks and is shaped by discourse related to exercise and dieting voiced by parents, friends, and teachers.

The most important finding of the study related to the issue of girls' discursive contexts is that 11 girls reported that they never talk with family members, other adults, or friends about images of women in the media or their feelings about their bodies. This deafening silence speaks volumes, as it indicates that, if their self-reports are accurate, half of the girls who participated in the initial interviews rely solely on mediated messages for information about what constitutes the normative standard for female appearance in the American cultural context. Additionally, because media literacy lessons have not yet been incorporated into public school curricula on a broad scale, these 11 girls who never talk to friends or family are deprived of the opportunity to question whether the images portrayed

are realistic and to receive support and validation for their critical evaluations of unhealthy representations of women and girls. As will be evident in the following discussion, not all conversations between girls and their friends and family members are conducive to girls' development of healthy relationships with their bodies. However, participating in some kind of conversation is more beneficial than engaging in no conversation at all, as dialogue of any kind indicates to girls that they are not alone in their struggles to negotiate relationships with the just-right ideal presented in the media and with their own bodies.

The girls who do talk about body-related issues within their interpersonal networks typically have these conversations with their mothers, demonstrating the influence of same-sex parents in shaping girls' relationships to their bodies. Several Jammer Girls and Protectionists have regular conversations with their mothers in which they criticize mediated imagery of women and girls' bodies. For example, Dawn Greensworth talks with her mother about once a week about how models look; she said that their conversations involve discussing how models "think that they're supposed to be skinny and tall, and they're not supposed to be." Dawn also has critical conversations with her friends about the appearance of women in the media on a weekly basis in which they "always make fun of the skinny, skinny girls because they're always saying that they want to gain weight, but me and my friends, we all know they don't...so they won't get fired from their modeling jobs." Dawn therefore often undermines the validity of the idealized images of femininity she encounters in the media by discussing her reactions and criticisms with family members and friends. Natasha also described frequent conversations with her mother about how women are portrayed in the media. Rose's family has conversations about the media and watch movies together; for instance, Rose's mother plainly delineates the bounds of modesty and throws away magazines and other mailings sent to their home that do not meet her criteria. As Rose

said, “My mom, she stays away from things that are inappropriate. Like if they’re not wearing covering up to here [gestures at her collarbone] or down here [gestures past her knee]. Because that’s immodest to show that much, including your stomach.” Although the topics of their conversations are very different, Dawn, Natasha, and Rose all maintain open dialogues with their mothers about mediated representations of women and girls.

Other girls’ conversations with friends about mediated imagery are not as productive. For instance, Weak Targeted Audience member Melody does not talk to her family members about women in the media, but she discusses how celebrities like Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato look with her friends; when asked about what those conversations are like and what they talk about, Melody replied, “Just like, um, how they stay thin, and um, how thin they are, how good they look.” In this way, Melody’s conversations with her friends serve as an echo chamber amplifying the body maintenance and beauty practices mandated by the just-right ideal. As described earlier, Targeted Audience member Michelle’s group of friends often compares the appearances of women in the media by flipping through a book of collaged images of models in magazines that her friend created. In their conversations about the “Model Book,” Michelle said, “We compare some of them to see like what they look like and compare them to other people....We sometimes like want to know who has blond hair, and then we’ll make a tally chart out of her book of who has blond hair. It’s just something that we like to do and do together.” Michelle and her friends collectively explore the mediated imagery displayed in the “Model Book” made by her friend (who wants to be a model when she grows up) in order to refine their conceptualizations of the just-right ideal and arrive at a group consensus about who is pretty (i.e., normal) and who is not (i.e., deviant).

Several girls told stories that conveyed their parents' lack of interest in or understanding of the media environments that girls must navigate. When watching YouTube videos of Blair's makeup tutorials, Preferred Reader Erica said that her mom finds Blair to be annoying and asks her to put her headphones in to listen to the video; as Erica explained, "Blair's really loud, and she talks really fast, and my mom's always like, 'Will you plug your headphones in or something? She's really annoying, she's really loud, she talks really fast!'" Rather than assessing what her daughter is watching or engaging her in a conversation about why she is so interested in makeup, Erica's mother attempts to tune out the media Erica consumes. Erica's friends also watch the Blair videos, and they give each other makeovers using her styling tips:

Really, I have a lot of makeup. And it's really all from Clinique, Mac, and Ulta, and Lancome. But I always do their [my friends'] makeup cuz I'm pretty good at doing makeup... Um, I have like themes, or like you guess you could call it that, um, goth, fairy, princess, pop star, rock star, I can do a Santa look. And I know a lot of looks cuz of Blair, and a lot of stuff to do.

Given the lack of interest on the part of Erica's mother in examining and criticizing the content of Blair's videos, Erica and her friends are free to uncritically reproduce the same visions of idealized femininity, translating Blair's instructions into practice. Also, Targeted Audience member Stacy McGuire said that she does not talk with her family or friends about images of women in the media, but she would like to begin that conversation; she said, "I would like to talk about the pictures with the women that's wanting to lose weight." In these cases, mothers and other significant adults in girls' social networks have missed opportunities to create conversation to counter the beauty industry's commoditized portrayals of women and girls.

In addition to discussing representations of women in the media, some girls also talk about how they feel about their bodies with their mothers. For instance, Jammer Girl JBear's

mother is a dietician, so healthful foods are often a topic of conversation for her and JBear, who suffers from a bone disorder that affects her ability to put on weight. When her mom cooks, “she talks with me the most about how I should, sometimes she’ll tell me, ‘You need to eat a little more. That’s not enough.’” In order to allay Weak Jammer Girl Kam’s concern about becoming overweight, Kam’s mother discusses the transition to puberty with her; Kam describes how her mom “says when girls are going through puberty, there’s no weight range you have to be in...When you’re going through puberty, there’s no real weight or no real look because your hormones are just going *LAAAA!* on the inside.” Kam and her mother visit BMI websites together to examine children’s weight charts and reassure Kam’s concerns about the normalcy of carrying weight around her midsection. Jammer Girl Natasha’s mother, who is a nurse, and her grandmother also provide her with information about how girls’ bodies change with the onset of puberty; Natasha related the following story:

We kind of go through that talk when...my body starts changing. We start talking about what my body should do...You shouldn’t look like anything in particular; you should just have a basic idea of what you should look like, like what your body should be doing, how it should be changing...When I feel like my body is changing and I don’t feel comfortable with it, I can talk to my grandma or my mamaw who had that experience when they were little and see if they can point me in the right direction on what to do.

Christina Morgan and Brittany Gomez also mentioned that they check in with their mothers about whether the weight and shape of their bodies are normal for their age. In this way, conversations between preadolescent girls and their mothers can provide important forums for preadolescent girls to learn more about the developmental process they are experiencing, especially considering that the body-weight fluctuations inherent to the onset of puberty can be a significant cause of body-related concerns for preadolescent girls (Offer, Schonert-Reichl, & Boxer, 1996).

The Prevalence of Dieting Behaviors Among Family Members and Friends

Another central element of girls' interpersonal discursive contexts in terms of body-related issues is their awareness of the extent to which their friends and family members engage in dieting to lose weight. Girls who participated in this study see dieting as a gendered phenomenon; with very few exceptions, when asked if members of their families or friends had ever been on diets, participants said that it is primarily their mothers and female friends who diet. Four girls reported that they knew girls their age who had dieted, and one of Preferred Reader Erica's friends had already battled an eating disorder when she was nine or ten years old; as Erica described it:

My friend was having an eating problem. She wouldn't eat because she felt overweight. And I kept telling her, 'You're not overweight.' I'm like, does she have bulimia, is she anorexic? I was so worried. But she's fine now. I was really worried about her. She wouldn't eat at all.

Jammer Girl Natasha said that she has taken it upon herself to learn more about healthy eating and attitudes toward food because she wants to prevent people in her social network from experiencing an eating disorder; she has read books and articles about eating disorders and said, "It seems really terrible for those people, and I just feel like I never want that to happen to me or my friends or my family." For both Erica and Natasha (the two eleven-year-old participants in the study), eating disorders are already a very real part of their interpersonal discursive contexts and pose a grave threat to girls their age.

Twelve girls (Dawn Greensworth, Crystal, Isabelle, Melody, Fish, Christina Morgan, Brittany Rose, Erica, Rose, Addie, Michelle, and Natasha) reported that their mothers have tried to lose weight by dieting, and their modeling of dieting behavior has proven instructive for some of the girls. On the rare occasions that girls said that their fathers had dieted, it was only in conjunction with their mothers' dieting. For example, while her parents were on the

popular Weight Watchers diet, Preferred Reader Isabelle used the program's calorie-counting book to learn how to monitor her own caloric consumption:

I was usually flipping through the book that would tell you like, a banana has, I don't know how many calories it has, but it would tell you how many calories, and I would usually just flip through it and see. Cuz, in the day, they would total up how many calories, and I would sometimes make my own chart and do it with them.

Although Isabelle did not report having ever dieted, she and her friends look at the nutritional labels on packaged foods like soda and chips, and they occasionally choose not to eat these foods based on what they read on the labels. Jammer Girl Dawn Greensworth and Preferred Reader Crystal described "co-dieting" with their mothers (i.e., following the same regimen of exercise and diet that their mothers do). Dawn Greensworth has "tried that [dieting] a million times, but I say exercise is best." Her mother tries to diet, "but she keeps on saying, "Oh, I'll start next week, I'll start it tomorrow, but she never does." Dawn is trying to get her mom to go on a diet with her, "but my mom, she always afternoon snacks and stuff. Um, she has, like, a half a bag of chips, half a container of peanuts, stuff like that." Both Dawn and her mother follow yo-yo dieting patterns that make food consciousness a constant theme within their family's discourse. Crystal and her mother also exercise and diet together; she said, "with my mom, we just talk about how we should eat and get stuff right with our bodies and try to do more exercise and stop being lazy and watch TV all day." Crystal and her mom go walking, use the Wii Fit, use her mother's "Walk Away the Pounds" CD, and go to the gym, and they occasionally exercise with a group of friends; as Crystal explained, "My friend's mom and my mom are really good friends, so they like to do all the stuff with us so that we can get more exercise." Dieting is thus a part of many girls' interpersonal discursive contexts, especially within their immediate families. Even the physical environments of some girls' homes facilitate weight management and dieting

behaviors, as Isabelle, Brittany Gomez, and Taylor have scales at home that they use to measure their weight, and Rose weighs herself at a friend's house.

As noted in the preceding discussion, several of the participants (Dawn, Crystal, and Isabelle) have already begun experimenting with dieting by following the examples set by their mothers. Several other participants have attempted to diet to lose weight on their own, including Targeted Audience member Brittany Gomez, who said that she tried dieting once when she was eight or nine years old. She said:

I just, I told my mom, 'I'm going to go on a diet' and she's like, 'What kind of diet?' cuz they're not all just like, going on a diet. And then, I just said, 'With no-fat foods and stuff.'...I would look on like, the package, the sugar and stuff, trans-fat...And then I quit that, I did it for like two days and then quit. It was hard.

Weak Protectionist Lovie attempted to diet in order to lose weight when she was in second grade (age seven to eight) with a group of three friends. She said that their diet involved trying to "eat lots of vegetables and like one sweet, or maybe like half a sweet a day." Lovie stopped dieting at the end of second grade when she started participating in athletic activities; during the period when she had dieted, "I didn't really swim and didn't do horseback riding, and I didn't do that much gymnastics, and I started that [doing exercise], and then I didn't care that much [about dieting]." The fact that both Lovie and Brittany Gomez had tried dieting as early as ages seven and eight should put to rest the comforting but naïve assumption that young girls are blissfully unaware of dieting as a strategy to relieve body-related anxieties by virtue of their youth and inexperience.

Weight Management Lessons in School Contexts

Girls' interpersonal discursive contexts are saturated with conversation about what it means to diet to lose weight, but it is not only parents and peers who are the sources of this information. Physical education and health teachers provide many of the girls in this study with information about the mechanics of dieting and weight loss, including lessons about

nutrition, physical activity, and calories. Hermione, Crystal, Isabelle, Brittany Gomez, McKinze8, Lovie, Cupcake, Melody, Christina Morgan, and Michelle all mention learning about exercise and nutrition in their PE and/or health classes. Preferred Reader Crystal said, “Our gym teacher, he talks about how we should be healthy and how we should treat our body so where it’s at where you want it to be...He talks about the food pyramid and how we should eat enough grains, beans, dairy, or sweets.” Similarly, Jammer Girl Christina said that her PE teacher “has like a graph of, she has like a picture of the food, and it actually shows how many carbs and calories are in this and what you shouldn’t eat and what you should eat.” Hermione said that her PE teacher talks about “exercising right” to “stay at the right weight.” Lovie’s PE teacher discusses nutrition often and seems to have inadvertently provided Lovie and her friends with the information they needed to diet in second grade, as Lovie said that her PE teacher has been giving lessons on nutrition and the calorie content of food since first grade.

From these lessons and through their interpersonal discursive contexts, several participants in the study have developed an understanding of the caloric calculations involved in diet programs, in which the basic formulation is that calories expended through exercise should exceed calories ingested through food. Weak Protectionist McKinze8 sometimes thinks about food in terms of exercise, such that when she is deciding what to eat, she thinks, “What should I eat? I could eat this and exercise a lot, but I could eat this and not exercise so much....So I’ll pick something that’s like, um, not good for you, but I eat it, and then I burn off the calories and all that when I ride my bike and play soccer.” Similarly, Weak Preferred Reader Lizzy said that she swims, runs, and jumps rope because they are fun activities that help her prevent weight gain; “When I do that stuff [exercise], I can be sure that I don’t get overweight. Like especially when I eat a little extra, then usually I

can exercise to overcome that.” After discussing that she loves to eat Oreos, but if she ate them all the time she would not be as healthy as normal, Preferred Reader Isabelle described the role she sees exercise as playing in staying healthy: “Um, the calories that you do eat from all the Oreos, you do burn them, and so you’re like, you feel comfortable, you say, ‘OK, I can eat these five Oreos, and then I can go ride my bike for ten minutes, and I can come back and eat a fruit roll-up and something then.’” The ability of these girls to conceptualize the caloric calculations that adults use to facilitate weight loss indicates that although physical education and health classes may offer students some information about the eating and exercise behaviors required for healthy development, they tend to do so in a way that is consonant with the discourse of “healthism,” which is defined in the Collins English Dictionary as a lifestyle that prioritizes health and fitness over anything else. Evans et al. (2002) found that a “culture of healthism” is deeply embedded in the various discursive practices of schools, including texts, curriculum, and pedagogy. Evans et al. (2002) argue that the social construction of “obesity” and “overweight” as articulated in curricular contexts may be seriously implicated in the production of disordered eating, as it equates good health with the appearance of thinness and ill health with the appearance of overweight, thereby fostering weight bias and appearance-related teasing of those who fail to “take care of themselves.”

In their interviews, girls easily shifted between using healthism discourses to explain their eating and exercise decisions (i.e., “eating right to stay healthy” and “avoiding fat and sweets to maintain heart health”) and drawing upon the caloric calculation discourse of weight-loss programs to justify their eating and exercise choices (i.e., “needing to exercise to avoid getting fat” and “watching calories to stay at the right weight”). The concomitant cultural preoccupation with childhood obesity and obsession with thinness construct

competing discourses of healthism and dieting in which the same means (eating healthfully and exercising) are promoted to achieve different ends: being healthy and staying slender. Participants seemed to conflate these two rival discourses, as the body maintenance behaviors promoted in the media, by their parents, and by their health educators in the school system are identical despite their differing motivations. Although the policy advocate concerned with childhood obesity might argue that children's awareness of exercise and dieting is beneficial in terms of preventing the so-called "obesity epidemic" among children, the findings of this study highlight that the context for creating this awareness of exercise and nutrition matters; in other words, parents and educators should be concerned not only with *what* information about health, exercise, and nutrition children receive, but also with *how* this information is presented and framed. Parents and educators must not make a slender appearance the primary indicator of health for young girls, as it reinforces mediated discourses emphasizing the centrality of a girls' appearance to her identity.

The Moderating Influence of Demographic Factors on Girls' Tendency to Self-objectify

Pragmatists reflecting upon this expansive survey of the mediated and interpersonal discourses that shape girls' relationships with their bodies and appearances may wonder whether any of these factors can help predict girls' relative vulnerabilities to disordered eating and depression. From the standpoint of objectification theory, the more salient questions relate to the influence of these discursive contexts on self-objectifying attitudes and self-surveillance, as none of the participants in this study have progressed so far through the theoretical model that they have experienced disordered eating or depression. Although five girls mentioned having dieted, their experiments with dieting behaviors are typically short-term in nature and pursued in conjunction with parents' dieting, signifying that these girls are not experiencing disordered eating but instead trying out behaviors they see as part

of being an adult. Therefore, rather than explore the relationships between media exposure as an objectification experience and disordered eating, the analysis will now evaluate some of the factors that seem to make some girls more susceptible to adopting self-objectifying attitudes and body-surveillance than others, as the construct of self-objectification/self-surveillance is proximal in the objectification theory model to body shame and anxiety, which are linked to disordered eating behaviors. In other words, because girls in this study are of an age at which they have not yet experienced disordered eating, it makes more sense to assess whether demographic variables are correlated with earlier constructs in the objectification theory model if the goal is to predict and prevent future problems with disordered eating.

Most notably, the racial backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses of the participants did not seem to affect the extent to which girls self-objectify and monitor their appearances. For instance, an African-American/Black girl was represented in all three of the major categories from the media use and criticism typology: Cupcake in the Protectionist group, Christina Morgan in the Jammer Girl group, and Crystal in the Preferred Reader group. However, that is not to say that demographic variables do not influence girls' relationships with their bodies and to the media. To the contrary, the variable of age emerged as a significant factor that seemed to be associated with whether a girl had adopted a self-objectifying attitude toward her body. In general, nine-year-old girls (who are typically in fourth grade) in this study showed far fewer indications of self-objectification and -surveillance than ten- and eleven-year-olds did. However, the influence of several moderating variables, such as health conditions that affect girls' weight and dieting within their families, complicate the generalizability of this observation. This finding points to the importance of targeting eating disorder prevention programs at younger girls between the

ages of eight and nine, before a self-objectifying mindset begins to significantly affect girls' lived experiences.

Five of the nine-year-old participants in this study – Hermione, McKinze8, Fish, Taylor, and Addie – showed no meaningful signs of self-objectification or body surveillance. They typically do not wish their bodies looked differently or worry about how they look to other people; Hermione's only worry about how she looks is trying "not to look like I just rolled out of the covers of my bed." Similarly, Fish's only concern is whether she looks nice when going out with her family to dinner. Taylor said she never worries about how she looks to other people; the only thought she has during the day about how she looks is "I look great!" Even though McKinze8 talked about wondering whether girls at school think she is pretty, she said that when she looks in the mirror as she gets ready for school, she thinks, "Wow, I'm really pretty!" None of these girls experiences any health concerns that affect their relationships with their bodies, and they do not perceive their weight to be abnormal. The shape and appearance of their bodies compared to representations of women in the media does not seem to be a particularly salient issue to these nine-year-olds, as they are all classified as either Weak Protectionists or Weak Jammer Girls and they do not have conversations with their family members or friends about mediated representations of women in the media and their feelings about their own bodies.

Some nine-year-old girls prove to be exceptions to the rule for several important reasons. First, nine-year-old girls who have health concerns that affect their ability to eat normally and exercise or who perceive themselves as being thinner or heavier than the normative just-right ideal display signals of self-objectification and body surveillance, a self-consciousness that seems to result from their feelings of abnormality within their social environments. For example, nine-year-old JBear has a bone disorder that makes her bones

soft and more vulnerable to breaking, thereby preventing her from engaging in high-impact forms of exercise. Because kids at school tease her about being “skin and bones,” JBear is unsure about her normalcy, constantly worrying about how she looks to her friends and assessing how her clothes appear and how she might be perceived by others, as she relates in the following story:

I really don't like how my hair frizzes out, cuz it makes me feel really different, and so I definitely don't like that. And I think about, 'Ooooo, do I really want to go unique [with my clothes], or do I want to just follow someone else? And I kind of just, I don't like showing myself, and I just feel really concerned about how I look and stuff. It kind of embarrasses me if I do my own unique thing.

Similarly, Christina Morgan considers herself to be abnormal because of her perceived overweight; she said in her initial interview that she wants to lose at least 70 to 80 pounds.

Two of her friends even attempt to help her “get thinner” by exercising with her.

Interestingly, both Christina and JBear embraced the opportunity to question and critique media images provided by the study and had cultivated strong Jammer Girl personas by the time of the debriefing interviews, expressing skepticism about the desirability of attaining the just-right ideal they encountered in the media. In fact, as described previously, Christina's participation in the study has led her to feel proud of her appearance and accept that she looks different from women portrayed in the media, as she recognizes that the media does not depict women of a wide variety of ages and shapes.

A second reason that some nine-year-old girls seemed to experience self-objectification and body surveillance is that they are in a transitory phase in which they are beginning to become aware of body concerns. For instance, nine-and-a-half-year-old Michelle compares how she looks to how models look, but she also reported that she does not typically think about whether the clothes she is wearing make her look good while at school or playing sports because “when my mind is set to do something else that I like, I

forget about other stuff.” Also, Michelle’s mother diets, and her friends are fascinated with comparing their appearances to the women pictured in the “Model Book,” so her interpersonal discursive context involves some amount of conversation about body maintenance and beauty practices. Another example of a nine-year-old in transition is Stacy McGuire, the girl who expressed a desire to discuss a weight-loss video that she saw on TV with her parents. Although Stacy reported that she does not think about her weight very much or feel uncomfortable with her body, she said that the reason why she exercises is to “get all of the calories out of my body.” Stacy’s seemingly contradictory statements indicate that she may be trying out some facets of appearance- and dieting-related discourse without necessarily internalizing them. Both Stacy and Michelle are categorized as members of the Targeted Audience, which is fitting, as their tentative explorations of the just-right ideal and body-related discourses seem ripe for exploitation by advertisers.

On the other hand, ten-year-old participants in the study no longer follow Carol Gilligan’s (1982) famous adage that girls are “confident at eleven, confused at sixteen.” The confusion and body-related anxiety now appears to begin at age ten (fifth grade), which may be related to the fact that fifth grade is often the last year of elementary school for students before matriculating to middle school and teenagerdom, as is the case in the Lexington public school district. Ten-year-olds Rose, Brittany Gomez, and Lovie and eleven-year-old Erica all express self-objectifying statements and discuss a tendency to self-monitor their appearances, despite the fact that none of them perceives herself to be an abnormal weight and none of them have health conditions affecting their ability to exercise or eat healthfully. Rose said, “Sometimes I worry I’m too big,” and weighs herself at a friend’s house to ensure that her weight is within an acceptable range (according to her, between 50 and 60 pounds). Remarkably, Rose is a Protectionist whose parents severely limit her access to mediated

imagery depicting “immodest” women, so this evidence of her body surveillance indicates that girls’ interpersonal discursive contexts (Rose’s mother diets) can be effective in introducing girls to self-objectifying attitudes even in the absence of mediated reinforcement. Targeted Audience member Brittany Gomez worries about how her hair and clothes look throughout the day, and she describes feeling worried about fitting into her clothes; she said, “Sometimes, I worry about like, if I put on a shirt, I’m like um, like I could fit that like last month and now I can’t...It makes me mad at myself...for letting, like, me not to exercise, and I can’t fit my stuff.” Similarly, Weak Protectionist Lovie went on a diet in second grade and said that she decides what to eat based on what she thinks she *should* eat from looking at calorie content on the labels of junk food. At age eleven, Preferred Reader Erica is already deeply entrenched in body surveillance and self-objectifying discourses, saying that she worries about how she looks to other people often; she describes those thoughts in the following way:

Sometimes, when I’m getting ready, I worry about what to wear. But sometimes when I’m actually there [at school], like, is my hair messed up from something? Things like that. Like, is something messed up? Is something different?...Does my hair look OK? Is anything wrong with my pants or my shirt? Do I smell bad? Stuff like that.

These ten- and eleven-year-old girls are well on their way toward adopting self-objectifying attitudes toward their appearances and their bodies before age sixteen, demonstrating that the kinds of cultural pressures developmental psychologists like Gilligan argued limit adolescent girls’ sense of self are salient to girls far earlier in their development than they were thirty years ago.

Two other ten-year-old girls did not express any self-objectifying attitudes of their own, but they imagined that their friends worry about how they look to other people, in a kind of third-person effect in which girls perceived body surveillance and body

dissatisfaction to be more important to their peers than to themselves. Weak Preferred Reader Lizzy said that she does not compare her appearance to those of other people, but she thinks her friends compare how they look to their friend, Hannah. Likewise, Protectionist Cupcake said that she does not compare how she looks to how other people look, but she thinks her friends and other girls her age do; “Like if they have another friend, they will compare themselves to how their other friend looks.” Although Lizzy and Cupcake do not engage in body surveillance, they believe that their peers do, indicating that body surveillance is normative for girls at age ten even if they do not participate in it themselves. Another important observation is that none of these girls (Erica, Rose, Brittany Gomez, Lovie, Lizzy, or Cupcake) reported talking with their families or friends about body-related issues, with the exception of her parents’ censorship of immodest women’s clothing in the case of Rose.

A final group of ten-year-old girls can be characterized as having concerns related to their health or weight that heighten their experiences of body surveillance and self-objectification. Preferred Reader Isabelle suffers from a skin condition, eczema, that makes her self-conscious about the appearance of her skin. Isabelle compares her height, weight, eating habits, and the size of her feet to those of her friends, and as mentioned previously, she and her friends compare their appearances to Selena Gomez and attempt to look more like her by performing makeovers on each other using online tutorials. As she gets ready for school, she worries, “Is my hair straight down, does my outfit match, and did I, like, brush my teeth and stuff?” Similarly, Weak Targeted Audience member Melody is concerned and self-conscious about being overweight, and she worries about how she looks to other people, particularly her friends at school. When she gets ready for school, Melody wonders “‘Does this look OK?’ and ‘Should I wear it?’ and um, like ‘Do I have anything to wear?’”

Melody and Isabelle are alike in that both of their mothers diet, and they never have conversations with friends or family members about body-related issues; these factors increase their exposure to body dissatisfaction in their interpersonal discursive contexts without providing them with an outlet to discuss and question their self-consciousness about their appearances.

The following three girls also cope with health concerns or self-consciousness about overweight; however, they also discuss these issues with their friends and family, albeit in different ways. Jammer Girl Dawn Greensworth worries about being overweight because she is diabetic; in fact, her doctor has even instructed her to lose 20 to 40 pounds. Although she adopts a critical attitude toward mediated images and regularly questions the realism of those images in conversation with her friends and family members, Dawn worries about how she looks to other people “a lot” and said, “I think that they think that I’m fat and that I’m too tall and I should be more like a girl, because I’m a really big tomboy. I hate pink, I hate dresses, I hate skirts, I hate high heels.” Despite her skepticism toward mediated imagery and frequent conversations about body-related issues with her friends and family, Dawn has internalized self-objectifying attitudes and body surveillance due to the weight-related concerns inherent to childhood diabetes. Weak Jammer Girl Kam also worries about being overweight, but her mother has attempted to counter her body dissatisfaction by talking with her about the physical changes associated with the pubertal transition. As Kam described it:

I used to compare how I look to how other people look when I was actually a little bit afraid that I was a little bit overweight, but now that I’m OK with it and I know I’m in puberty, I’m fine with it. I was kind of looking at some people because they were like, really, really, thin, like some of my friends, and I was like ‘How do they stay that thin?’...I kind of got scared every now and then that I was going to get really overweight, and when I ate too much or something like that, when I was eating I was thinking, ‘Am I eating too much? Am I going to gain a lot of weight off of this?’

In this way, Kam oscillates between adopting a critical attitude toward the media, as she did when she talked about the YouTube video she watched about photo retouching techniques, and heaping derision upon women who transgress the just-right ideal, as she did when talking about her photo collage entitled “Ugly people in the media.” Preferred Reader Crystal also talks with her mother about body-related issues, but they typically discuss these issues in the context of co-dieting and helping each other diet and exercise. Crystal said that she sometimes compares how she looks to how other people look; “At my school, girls are thinner than me, so I was like, ‘Oh, I want to be her’ and such and such.” When she worries about how she looks to other people, Crystal thinks, “I would want to look like her, the same things over and over. And how does she do that? [Look that way].” For Crystal, Kam, and Dawn, then, the combination of their age and their concern about being overweight makes them more susceptible to body surveillance and self-objectification discourses, even with discursive advantages to counter these patterns potentially provided by conversations with their mothers.

In examining these demographic variables, it becomes clear that Jammer Girls who question the supremacy of the just-right ideal in their mediated environments are not necessarily inoculated from body dissatisfaction and body surveillance. As evidenced by the cases of Dawn, JBear, and Christina Morgan, Jammer Girls are not immune from these pressures, which might seem to undermine the validity of media literacy as a strategy to prevent disordered eating. However, upon closer inspection, these three girls seem to have developed a critical consciousness about mediated imagery precisely *because of* their heightened sensitivity to body-related issues for which they already had been teased and ostracized. In this way, we can see body dissatisfaction as predating media criticism for these

Jammer Girls, who may have initially come to be critical of media images as a way to cope with their feelings of body dissatisfaction and who still experience lingering anxieties.

Eleven-year-old Natasha provides a case-in-point of how the early adoption of a Jammer Girl identity – absent complicating factors such as health concerns and perceptions of overweight – can offer inoculation against the internalization of the just-right ideal.

Natasha educates herself about body-related issues; she said, “I read lots of books about your body and make sure that usually you should be the correct age range for your weight...American Girl has a lot of cool books that kind of help you explain about how your body works.” She describes the appearance of the “perfect woman” as follows: “She’s beautiful in her own way, the way she talks and speaks and how she puts her words and how she treats other people” and focuses on how her body feels in assessing her weight and the fit of her clothing. She indicated that she never worries about how she looks to other people except for when she is getting ready for a big event, like a concert. Natasha said that she would never go on a diet without her doctor’s approval because girls her age “don’t really need to worry about that,” but she is very concerned about the problem of eating disorders among girls her age; she has read about eating disorders, which she describes as when “girls think they weigh too much and they try and kind of stop their bodies’ eating habits and lower everything and try and go on diets when they’re too young.” Natasha regularly talks with her mother about how she feels about her body as well as the ways in which women and girls in the media are portrayed. In other words, Natasha is the exception that proves the rule: when unencumbered by serious body-related self-consciousness related to health/overweight and equipped with a supportive discursive environment that is open to critical conversation about body-related issues, girls who consider the political and economic forces that shape the just-right ideal they are sold through mediated imagery can avert body

surveillance and body dissatisfaction. The key is to commence efforts to help girls explore the Jammer Girl persona before the age of ten, by which time in their development girls may have already adopted discourses of self-objectification and body surveillance that may prove more challenging for them to dislodge from their lived experiences.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Contrary to popular misconceptions, idealized mediated imagery of women and girls does not cause eating disorders. The process of becoming a female body in the 21st-century American media environment is far more complex than a simple linear, cause-effect equation can express. Differences among girls in terms of media use, degree of media criticism, age, and interpersonal discursive environments moderate their relationships to mediated imagery and to their bodies, and girls' differential decoding of the meanings associated with mediated imagery uncovered in this study demonstrate the baselessness of the assumption that mediated portrayals of women have universal, direct effects on girls' relationships to their bodies. Instead, adults interested in providing girls with resources to help them navigate the body dissatisfaction discourses swirling through their interpersonal and mediated cultural environments should explore the quality of girls' knowledge, understandings, and experiences of their bodies produced through relations with images. In the case of this study, the exploration of the processes by which preadolescent girls interact with mediated imagery revealed that girls perceive the becoming of celebrity bodies to involve both beauty product consumption and intense scrutiny by paparazzi and fans, indicating that for girls in this study, the becoming of a celebrated body mandates anticipatory enculturation to adult beauty practices and the adoption of a self-objectifying stance. Girls also perceived clear rewards and punishments associated with attaining, or failing to attain, the just-right ideal. However, because there is not a straight line connecting exposure to mediated imagery and the experience of disordered eating and body dissatisfaction, researchers, educators, and parents concerned with the epidemic of disordered eating among American girls have myriad opportunities to provide girls with tools to disrupt the hegemony of the empire of images.

Recommendations for Researchers

This study offers researchers interested in eating disorder prevention insights regarding the development of effective campaigns and curriculum for preadolescent girls. Of the variables affecting girls' relationships to their bodies, it seems that increasing the degree to which girls criticize mediated imagery of women and girls is the most appropriate aspect to address via curricula and interventions designed to reduce incidence of disordered eating in girls. Health issues affecting girls' weight and girls' perceptions of the normalcy of their weight are almost impossible to address through educational efforts, as they are deeply embedded psychosomatic concerns that girls grapple with on a very personal level. The quality of girls' conversations about body-related issues with friends, family, and teachers is also difficult to improve through curricular efforts, as this kind of broad-based undertaking would involve programming for not only girls but also their teachers and parents, which is beyond the realm of fiscal possibility for most sponsoring organizations. Finally, the moderating variable of whether a girl's mother diets is similarly complicated to address, considering that it would require in-depth work with mothers on their own body image issues and consideration of mothers' health concerns to reduce the prevalence of dieting among girls' mothers.

Moreover, the "internalization of cultural standards of appearance" construct in objectification theory, which some media literacy programs (Richardson, Paxton, & Thomson, 2009; Stice, Rohde, Gau, & Shaw, 2009; Wilksch & Wade, 2009; Wilksch, Tiggemann, & Wade, 2006) have been expressly designed to reduce, may be more feasible to address in eating disorder prevention efforts than constructs such as sexual objectification experiences (which are difficult to avoid in a patriarchal culture) and self-objectification and body surveillance (which are diffuse cognitive patterns that become difficult to target in

time-limited intervention programs). In the objectification theory framework, the internalization of cultural standards of appearance mediates the relationships between body shame and both the constructs of self-objectification/body surveillance and sexual objectification experiences, meaning that a media literacy intervention targeting the internalization of cultural standards of appearance would theoretically reduce levels of two key variables affecting the incidence of disordered eating, killing two metaphorical birds with one stone.

Briefly, internalization of cultural standards of appearance, which is measured with the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire modified for use with adolescents by Smolak, Levine, and Thompson (2001), assesses both awareness/familiarity with the thin ideal and internalization/adoption of that ideal. Items from the Awareness subscale include “Most people believe that the thinner you are, the better you look” and “In today’s society, it is important to always look attractive,” and items from the Internalization subscale include “Music videos that show thin women make me wish that I were thin” and “I wish I looked like a swimsuit model” (Smolak, Levine, & Thompson, 2001, p. 219). Media literacy training typically involves reducing participants’ agreement with these statements by helping girls develop skills for recognizing advertising strategies and photo manipulation techniques (literacy) and take steps to combat negative images and promote positive images (advocacy). According to Dohnt and Tiggemann (2008, p. 223), media literacy programs have been effective in producing body image improvements for adolescent girls (McVey, Lieberman, Voorberg, Wardrope, & Blackmore, 2003; Neumark-Sztainer, Sherwood, Collier, & Hannan, 2000; Piran, Levine, & Irving, 2000; Wade, Davidson, & O’Dea, 2003; Wilksch, Tiggemann, & Wade, 2006; Wilksch & Wade, 2009; Richardson, Paxton, & Thomson, 2009).

The author reviewed numerous eating disorder prevention programs for children and adolescents developed by psychology researchers for implementation in classroom settings and identified several key limitations to these programs (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2008; Richardson & Paxton, 2010; Richardson, Paxton, & Thomson, 2009; McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Salmon, 2006; Steese et al., 2006; Stewart et al, 2001; Heineke et al., 2007; Withers & Wertheim, 2004; McVey, Davis, Tweed, & Shaw, 2004; LeCroy, 2004; Stice, Rohde, Gau, & Shaw, 2009; Neumark et al., 2000; Wilksch & Wade, 2009). First, of the thirteen programs evaluated, only two of these interventions were tested with girls younger than the age of ten (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2008; McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Salmon, 2006), one of which was found to be ineffective in terms of improving body image as an outcome variable (McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Salmon, 2006). The other program (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2008) was tested with girls aged five to nine, but the program consisted of a single-session intervention that involved reading aloud a pre-developed storybook (called *Shapesville*) with messages about body image, self-esteem, healthy eating, and the unrealistic idealized images of women in the media, which offers information to highly technologically literate young children a decidedly low-tech medium. As Wilksch and Wade (2009) argue in discussing directions for future research, “Prevention efforts with younger audiences than those in the present study (age 13) are indicated, given that risk factors are increasingly emerging at a preadolescent age, as well as our earlier finding that the media literacy program is of limited benefit with older female-only audiences” (p. 659). Therefore, based on the findings of this study and recommendations from other researchers engaged in media literacy program development and evaluation (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2008; Wilksch & Wade, 2009; Grogan, 2010), there is a dire need to develop media literacy programs targeted toward girls between the ages of eight and nine.

Second, none of the reviewed eating disorder prevention programs were based on the conceptual framework of objectification theory, forgoing the explanatory and predictive power afforded by this theory to recognize warning signs for disordered eating (such as body shame and appearance anxiety) before the actual onset of disordered eating, which is crucial to prevention programs aimed at young girls. Finally, none of these programs used media communication techniques, only educational curriculum delivered in classroom settings, despite the potential of media campaigns to ameliorate the stigma associated with disordered eating (Gowers & Shore, 1999) by creating openings in interpersonal and cultural discourses to discuss unrealistic portrayals of women in the media and their effects on women and girls. Additionally, curricular interventions may not be as engaging as media-oriented programs; as Glanz and Bishop (2010) observe, “Health-promotion interventions should be as entertaining and engaging as the other activities with which they compete. No matter how important they are, health communication and education are secondary to attracting and retaining the interest and enthusiasm of the audience” (p. 412). Therefore, it is incumbent upon communication and education researchers to reach out to psychologists who develop school-based programs in order to enhance curricular approaches to promoting media literacy with actual media campaigns.

In addition to developing eating disorder prevention programs that account for differences in the ways in which girls interpret mediated imagery that were identified in this study, researchers could design further studies to answer important research questions raised by the present investigation. First, the popularity of the Disney Girls among participants and their prominence throughout the Tween media environment merits additional examination by cultural and media studies scholars interested in conducting content and discourse analysis of media texts. Although effort was made in the present study to provide some

background information about the Disney Girls, the narratives, character portrayals, and marketing techniques used in Disney programming deserve a more in-depth treatment to illuminate common discursive themes and patterns of representation characteristic of the Walt Disney Company's productions for the Tween audience segment. Second, researchers engaged with quantitative methods for addressing research questions would be well suited to the task of refining the media use and interpretation typology by gathering data from a larger randomized sample of preadolescent girls from which results could be more generalizable. Larger sample sizes should also allow for greater specificity regarding typical amounts of media use, and media criticism could be effectively measured with a version of the Critical Processing of Beauty Images scale by Engeln-Maddox and Miller (2008) modified for use with a preadolescent population. This survey project could also confirm that the transition between ages nine and ten is the developmental period at which girls adopt self-objectifying attitudes toward their bodies by gathering demographic data, which Levine and Harrison (2009, p. 496) cite as a critical research need. The author has already developed a draft version of this survey instrument, which assesses adolescent and preadolescent girls' media exposure and relative levels of internalization of cultural standards of beauty, self-objectification, body surveillance, and disordered eating attitudes and behaviors in order to determine when developmentally girls begin to experience the first steps in the objectification theory model.

Finally, researchers interested in the issue of how girls' interactions with the media influence their relationships with their bodies could further probe the ways in which girls interpret their body projects as displays of beauty and acumen in achieving the just-right ideal with other girls imagined as their primary audience versus presentations of sexual attractiveness with boys perceived as their primary audience. Future projects employing

qualitative research methods could analyze the discourse of preadolescent and adolescent girls in order to determine at what point in their development girls shift from conceiving of beauty as a form of social currency among other girls to regarding beauty as a form of sexual currency to curry favor with boys. Qualitative research is also recommended to pursue a deeper understanding of how lesbians and transgendered persons experience self-objectification; although several quantitatively oriented research projects testing objectification theory's applicability to lesbian women have been pursued by psychological researchers (see Kozee & Tylka, 2006; Haines et al., 2008), more qualitative work needs to be conducted to enrich scholarly understanding of the ways in which non-heteronormative sexualities complicate the propositions of objectification theory, particularly among girls and young women in the process of exploring their sexual identities.

Recommendations for Educators

This study suggests that the school setting is a central context in which girls feel self-conscious about their appearances and experience body-related teasing, which points to the need for educators to be offered tools to foster supportive learning environments for preadolescent girls. As indicated in the discussion of the competing discourses of healthism and appearance, it is critical for educators to be conscious of how they frame discussion about the issues of eating and exercise in the classroom and how discrimination and harassment based on weight and body shape affects the learning environment. A team of researchers with the Canadian government has already developed a web-based training tool to assist fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade teachers in their work to promote positive body image and help prevent the onset of disordered eating in children. *The Student Body: Promoting Health at Any Size* program developed and tested by McVey, Gusella, Tweed, and Ferrari (2009) consists of six online learning modules that provide educators with practical tools to

combat weight bias and appearance-related harassment at school (see <http://research.aboutkidshealth.ca/thestudentbody/home.asp>). The learning modules include information about media and peer pressures to diet, healthy ways to talk about eating-related attitudes and behaviors, information about natural increases in weight and body fat associated with puberty, strategies for preventing weight-based teasing and sexual harassment, information about the influence of adult role models on children's body image, and recommendations for creating a healthy school climate that promotes size acceptance. Each module includes not only case studies and background information on each topic but also instructions for classroom activities, handouts for parents, and lists of supplementary resources for teachers. Educators and school administrators concerned with how elements of the school environment reinforce body dissatisfaction among girls should consider making systematic use of *The Student Body* program, as it is a free resource that could be utilized for training purposes during a school in-service. The Center for Media Literacy (<http://www.medialit.org/>) and the Media Literacy Clearinghouse (<http://www.frankwbaker.com/default1.htm>) may also prove useful for educators and administrators who would like to incorporate media literacy into their school curricula, and the Media Education Foundation (http://www.mediaed.org/index_html) is an excellent source of educational videos about media and culture for the classroom.

Recommendations for Parents

Based on this study, parents of preadolescent girls, particularly mothers, can exert an important influence in their daughters' development of healthy relationships with their bodies. Most importantly, parents can engage in critical conversations about the ways in which women and girls are depicted in the media with their daughters. These critical conversations require parents to pay attention to the types of media content their daughters

use, “co-view” media content with their daughters, and facilitate girls’ criticism of unrealistic imagery by asking questions such as “What do you think the advertisers are trying to sell by using this picture?” or “Why do you think girls on this show only look a certain way?” Simply by attending to their daughters’ media consumption and asking critical questions, parents can open discursive spaces in which girls feel safe to voice their perceptions and interpretations of mediated imagery. In this way, critical conversations with parents can help girls understand that the just-right ideal they see depicted in the media is not a requirement for happiness, but rather a cultural construct laden with very specific political-economic imperatives. A helpful resource for parental co-viewing is the website of Common Sense Media (<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/>), which provides media content reviews and advice for parents seeking guidance with managing their families’ media use specific to the ages of their children. Another resource is the Media Awareness Network (<http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/index.cfm>), which offers parents practical tips and tutorials for how to talk with children about the media.

Parents should also be aware of the ways in which they model “body talk” and body maintenance and beauty practices such as dieting, makeup use, and exercise. As demonstrated in this study, preadolescent girls are far from oblivious to discussion about body-related issues; in fact, they are actively seeking information about what is normative in terms of body weight, shape, and appearance from both their interpersonal and mediated contexts. Parents, particularly same-sex parents, can assess the quality of their modeling of body-related attitudes and behaviors by asking themselves questions such as “Am I dissatisfied with my shape, size, and weight? Do I talk about this around my daughter? Do I make negative comments about the way other people look?” Parents can also reflect upon the types of media content they watch, the beauty products they buy and use, and the dieting

and exercise regimens to which they adhere in order to assess how their choices might affect their daughters. Co-dieting with daughters should be avoided at all costs, as it not only models restrictive eating habits but also introduces girls to practicing these habits at an age at which it is entirely inappropriate for children to begin dieting absent a doctor's recommendation.

In both media co-viewing and conversations about body-related feelings, it is critical for parents to emphasize to girls that how they feel and what they can do with their bodies are more important and meaningful than how they look. To underscore this message, parents can support their daughters' participation in activities that validate aspects of their identities that are entirely unrelated to how they look, such as athletics, arts and crafts, music, volunteering, and student leadership. If girls have not yet gravitated toward specific interests, then parents can encourage their involvement in organizations like the Girl Scouts of the USA that allow girls to try out new hobbies and activities. Even if their daughters are receiving less healthy messages from their media environments and friendship networks, parents can help girls resist adopting body dissatisfaction discourses by offering critical perspectives on the just-right ideal, modeling healthy relationships to eating and exercise, and giving girls opportunities to explore other facets of their identities beyond their appearances.

A Final Caution to Researchers, Educators, and Parents

In offering these recommendations and resources for researchers, educators, and parents, the intention is not to somehow imply that it is incumbent upon adults to rescue girls from this latest girlhood crisis. Adults cannot serve as the saviors of girls' relationships with their bodies; we are vastly unqualified for this task, as adults are responsible for the creation and maintenance of the toxic mediated and interpersonal discourses of body dissatisfaction into which American girls are born and socialized. Instead, these

recommendations are meant to help researchers, educators, and parents offer girls resources to emancipate themselves from the cognitive and emotional limitations imposed by perceiving the female body as an ornament to decorate, compare, and improve superficially rather than a gift to experience and enjoy. Given the creative space and tools to question mediated portrayals of women and girls, critique the motivations of advertisers who profit from these depictions, and produce their own media that better represents their lived experiences, 21st-century American girls have unlimited potential to neutralize the effects of body dissatisfaction on their minds and bodies by invalidating a consumptively oriented physical ideal and reconstructing a new vision of girlhood that fully encompasses everything they are and can do. But this transformation of girl culture must occur at the initiative *of* girls inspired by less reductive images of girlhood *for* girls who continue to struggle with the pressure to conform to plasticized ideals embodied by the Disney Girls and other manufactured starlets. Researchers, educators, and parents can assist in this reformation by creating media literacy curricula designed for preadolescent girls, safe school environments where a girl's appearance has no bearing on her ability to learn and grow, and healthy interpersonal discursive contexts where girls can criticize mediated imagery and freely express their feelings about their bodies. If empowered by the adults in their lives with the resources to develop a healthy relationship between their minds and bodies, then this generation of girls could be the first women in American history to be free of both the external shackles of political and economic inequality and the internal restraints imposed by body dissatisfaction and self-negation. Unencumbered by these restrictions, 21st-century girls could unleash a revolution in the American female consciousness on par with the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but only if the adults in their lives recognize the realities and challenges associated with becoming a body in the American cultural

context and equip them with effective tools for charting new courses and negotiating new ways of being.

APPENDIX A

Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Race	Parents' Careers	Parents' Income	Parents' Marital Status	Siblings (#, Age, Gender)	School	Describe Self and Friends	Hobbies and Extracurr.	Cell Phone ?	Computer?
McKinze8	9	4 th	White	1. Software consultant/sales associate 2. Software engineer	1. Between \$62,000 and \$74,999 2. More than \$75,000	Divorced	Brother, 6 Brother, 1	Sandersville	I'm really athletic and I really like to play outside.	Soccer, bike riding, running track and field, collecting stuffed animals (especially monkeys).	No	No
Natasha	11	5 th	White	1. Registered nurse – St. Joseph 2. Dept. of Education, early childhood branch	1. Between \$42,000 and \$51,999 2. Between \$52,000 and \$61,999	Married	Sister, 7	Sandersville	Make anyone laugh or smile, and I love to read and write, and people are inspired and they like me for that	Reading and writing and drawing and playing with pets	Yes	No, but is saving up for one
Rose	10	5 th	White	1. Computer engineer 2. Homemaker	1. More than \$75,000 2. Less than \$20,000	Married	Sister, 12 Brother, 7 Sister, 4 Brother, 2	Meadowthorpe	I don't talk very much. We do sign language a lot.	Sing in chorus, play piano, play outside.	No	No
Dawn Greensworth	10	5 th	White	1. DOT/OPER admin. assistant – Industrial Gas	1. Between \$20,0001 and \$34,999	Single mom	Half-sister, 18 Half-brother, 16	Seton Catholic	Silly, crazy, we always make people laugh when we're together. And sometimes we just run around screaming!	Sing, draw, play basketball, knitting	N/A	N/A
Michelle	9.5	4 th	White	1. Engineering assistant manager, automotive 2. Family CEO	1. Decline to respond	Married	Sister, 5	Liberty	Likes to have a few close friends. They like to play tag and have slumber parties	Gymnastics, piano, golf	No	No
Stacy McGuire	9	4 th	No answer (adopted)	1. Secretary at public school 2. Controller/financial officer in road construction	1. Between \$20,0001 and \$34,999 2. More than \$75,000	Married	Sister, 18 Brother, 16	Seton Catholic	Like to play games and spend time together		N/A	N/A
Brittany Rose	10	5 th	African-American	1. Payroll accountant 2. Assistant manager, auto manufacturer	1. Between \$42,000 and \$51,999 2. Between \$42, 000 and \$51,999	Married	Sister, 16 Sister, 5	Sandersville	Funny, like to talk.	Drama club, gymnastics, track (long jump, 100- and 400-meter	N/A	N/A

										dash), computers		
Taylor	9	4 th	White	1. Part-time office manager (trained as research psychologist) 2. Clinical psychologist	1. Between \$20,001 and \$34,999 2. More than \$75,000	Married	Brother, 6	Liberty	Kind, nice, friendly	Soccer, collecting Silly Bandz	No	No
Kam	10	5 th	White	1. Homemaker/volunteer 2. Tax analyst/CPR at Lexmark	1. Less than \$20,000 2. More than \$75,000	Married	Sister, Newborn	Russell Cave	Crazy, funny, energetic, like to play werewolves	Chorus, art club, academic club, debate club	No	Yes
Brittany Gomez	10	5 th	Mixed race	1. Customer service	1. Between \$52,000 and \$61,999	Single mom	Sister, 13 Half-sister, 5 Half-sister, 20	Sandersville	Talkative, like to go shopping and go to the movies	Read, play outside, play volleyball	Yes	No
Fish	9	4 th	White	1. Program chief, USDA 2. Corporate planning and finance, Lexmark	1. Decline to respond	Married	Brother, 13	Seton Catholic	Nice, like to play games	Playing soccer and basketball	Yes	Yes
Melody	10	5 th	White	1. Occupational therapist 2. Retired physician	1. Between \$62,000 and \$74,999 2. More than \$75,000	Married	None	Seton Catholic	Caring, fun, nice, like to talk	Brown belt in Karate, chorus	Yes	Yes
Christina Morgan	9	4 th	Black	1. Homemaker (disabled) 2. Assistant food services director	1. Less than \$20,000 2. Between \$42,000 and \$51,999	Married	Brother, 21 Sister, 16 Sister, 15	Liberty	Funny, smart, like to watch movies and talk	Collect dolls, sing, dance (especially ballet), computers	Yes	No
Hermione	9	4 th	Asian-American	1. Part-time preschool teacher 2. Mechanical engineer	1. Less than \$20,000 2. More than \$75,000	Married	Brother, 5	Dixie	Like to act out Harry Potter books	Sketching, jump rope, riding her bike	N/A	N/A
Lizzy	10	4 th	White	1. Homemaker 2. Sales, Radio Electronic Equipment Co.	1. Not employed 2. Between \$52,000 and \$61,999	Married	Brother, 12	Dixie	Go with the flow, like to watch movies, have a book club (currently reading Junie B. Jones)	Book club, baton, jump rope, traveling, running, swimming	No	No
Crystal	10	5 th	Black	1. Substitute teacher, student	1. Less than \$20,000	Single mom	Brother, 4 Brother, 1 Half-sister, 16	Deep Springs	Like to talk, go roller-skating, spend time together. "I like to be me, I don't like to judge people or anything. I just like staying my own self. I don't judge people or anything. My friends and I	Softball, tennis, playing the clarinet	Yes	No

										don't hang out with any bad people. We just stay really calm and don't act crazy."			
Cupcake	10	5 th	Black	1. Customer service representative (call center) 2. Retired	Decline to respond	Lives with Grandma	4 brothers: 15, 11, 10, 6	Northern	Like to shop and talk	Rollerskate, play clarinet	No	No	
Addie	9	4 th	White	1. Nanny	1. Less than \$20,000	Single mom	Sister: 14	Glendover	Like to read and listen to music	Reading, playing violin, playing soccer	N/A	N/A	
Lovie	10	4 th	White	1. Medical social worker 2. Medical coder (seeking employment)	1. Between \$52,000 and \$61,999	Married	None	Glendover	Like to listen to music and play board games and we like to jump on my two friends' trampolines	Art, swimming, horseback riding, gymnastics	Yes	No	
Isabelle	10	4 th	White	1. Billing specialist for MD (Pain Management) 2. Owner of oil distributorship	1. Between \$20,001 and \$34,999 2. Between \$52,000 and \$61,999	Married	Brother, 7	Dixie	Talkative. Likes shopping, swimming and other kinds of sporty activities, and watching movies.	Volleyball, running, the STLP (student technology leadership program), Glee Club.	iPod with texting	No	
Erica	11	5 th	White	1. Banking vice president 2. Sales	1. More than \$75,000 2. More than \$75,000	Divorced	Zero, but Stepsister, 17	Seton Catholic	Outgoing and very competitive. Like to play Truth or Dare and do makeovers.	Basketball, swimming, diving, volleyball	N/A	N/A	
JBear	9	4 th	Adopted (don't know)	1. Public health inspector (radiation division) 2. Dictation	1. Between \$42,000 and \$51,999 2. Between \$42,000 and \$51,999	Married	Sister, 6	Glendover	Nice, like to read	Reading, computers, singing in choral program, playing viola, swimming, climbing, running, jump rope	No	Yes	

APPENDIX B

Rapport-building

PI will provide a brief description of her background and interest in the topic.

PI will ask participants to answer the questions in a way that reflects their true feelings instead of answering the way that they think the researcher wants them to.

The PI will emphasize that the girls can skip questions and can withdraw. The PI would ask them whether they understand that they can skip/withdraw and whether they understand how to do so.

About you

How old are you (in years)?

What grade are you in?

What is your race / ethnicity? (American Indian, Asian / Asian-American, Black / African-American, Hispanic / Latina American, White / Caucasian, Other / Prefer Not to Answer)

Are your parents married, divorced, or single?

How many siblings do you have? (Number of brothers, number of sisters) Are you the big sister or the little sister?

How would you describe yourself? Your friends?

Where do you go to school?

What do you like to do? (Hobbies, extracurricular activities)

Self-Objectification: Adapted from items from the Objectified Relationship with the Body subscale of the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale (Tolman & Porche, 2000)

How can you tell whether you are at a good weight?

Do you ever wish your body were different? What do you wish you could change about your body?

What do you think the “perfect” woman looks like?

What is more important to you: how your body looks, or how it feels?

Do you feel comfortable looking at all parts of your body in the mirror? If not, what parts of your body make you feel uncomfortable to look at?

How do you decide how much to eat? By how hungry you are, or by how much you think you *should* eat?

Body Surveillance: Adapted from the Surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body

Consciousness Scale for Youth (Lindberg, Shibley Hyde, & McKinley, 2006)

Do you compare how you look to how other people look? Who do you compare yourself to?

How often during the day do you think about how you look? What are those thoughts like?

How often during the day do you worry about whether the clothes you are wearing make you look good?

How often do you worry about how you look to other people? What are those thoughts like?

Eating Attitudes and Dieting Behaviors: Adapted from the Children’s Eating Attitudes Test

(Maloney et al., 1989)

Are you ever scared about being overweight or underweight?

How often do you think about food? What do you think about?

Do you think about the energy (calorie) content in the foods that you eat?

Are there any types of food that you avoid eating? Why do you avoid them?

Do you ever feel guilty after eating?

What kinds of exercise do you do? Why do you exercise?

Do you ever think about wanting to be thinner or worry about fat on your body? Do you ever think about wanting to gain weight?

Have you ever tried to lose weight by dieting?

Has your mother ever been on a diet to lose weight? Is your mother overweight?

Has your father ever been on a diet to lose weight? Is your father overweight?

Has your brother or sister ever been on a diet to lose weight?

Have you ever had a friend on a diet to lose weight?

Would your friends like you more if you were thinner or heavier?

Have you ever lost so much weight by dieting that people started to worry about you or said you were “too thin?”

Body-related Conversations with Parents and Peers

How often do you talk to your parents about pictures of women's bodies in the media and your feelings about your own body? What do you talk about?

How often do you talk to other adults (teachers, other family members) about pictures of women's bodies in the media and your feelings about your own body? What do you talk about?

How often do you talk to your friends about pictures of women's bodies in the media and your feelings about your own body? What do you talk about?

Assessing participants' comfort with the questions

The PI will ask “Is there anything I asked you that made you uncomfortable? If so, what was that?”

Diary form review

The PI will review an example image of a woman's body found in an online media source with the participants and then review the email diary form questions in response to these images to ensure that the participants understand the language in the diary form.

Collage software instruction

The PI will offer basic training in computer-based collaging techniques that the girls will use to collect imagery of women's bodies in the media. To do this, the researcher will use a laptop computer to demonstrate how to use Internet Explorer and Google Images to gather images and PowerPoint to create the collage.

Email address and pseudonym selection

The PI will ask the participants to provide the email address that the PI will use to contact the participants throughout the diary/collaging portion of the study.

The PI will ask the participants to select a pseudonym for use in diary form and transcript labeling.

APPENDIX C

Media Use Questions. For participants' first diary entry, they will be asked to respond to the following questions. These questions will only be asked of the participants in the first of the six diary entries.

How much time do you spend watching television during a typical week day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

How much time do you spend watching television during a typical weekend day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

What programs or types of shows do you typically watch? (Names of three favorite shows or channels)

How much time do you spend reading magazines during a typical week day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

How much time do you spend reading magazines during a typical weekend day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

What magazines do you read? (Names of three magazines you typically read)

How much time do you spend listening to music during a typical week day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

How much time do you spend listening to music during a typical weekend day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

How do you listen to music? How do you listen to music? (On a CD player, on an iPod or other portable music player, etc.)

What kind of music or musical artists do you typically listen to? (Names of three musicians or types of music you like to listen to)

How much time do you spend on the computer/online during a typical week day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

How much time do you spend on the computer/online during a typical weekend day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

What websites do you visit online? (Names of the websites, including Facebook and MySpace, video gaming sites, and other sites you visit regularly)

How much time do you spend playing video games during a typical week day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

How much time do you spend playing video games during a typical weekend day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

What video games do you play? (Names of three video games you play)

How much time do you spend watching movies during a typical week day? (Number of hours, number of minutes).

How much time do you spend on watching movies during a typical weekend day? (Number of hours, number of minutes)

Where do you watch movies: on TV, at the theater, or on the computer?

What are your favorite kinds of movies? (Three movie types or movie titles)

Open-Ended Questions. For these questions used in the email diaries for weeks two through six, participants are provided with space in the Qualtrics form to type in open-ended responses.

What picture or pictures of women or girls in the media stood out to you? Please describe the picture or pictures and where you saw them (website name, magazine name, TV ad). Also, describe where you were when you saw the picture (at home, in your bedroom, at school, at a friend's house).

Why did this picture stand out to you? What about the picture caught your eye?

How does this picture make you feel about your body?

What would happen if a girl looked more like the woman in this picture? How would her life change?

What do you think that girls like you do to look more (or less) like the woman in this picture? (Buy clothes, wear makeup).

Do you think the picture is selling something? If so, what? Does the picture make you more or less likely to want to buy what the picture is trying to sell?

If you could, what would you change about this picture?

Have you talked to your friends or family about this picture? If so, what did you talk about?

APPENDIX D

Follow-up on Email Diaries

If applicable, the PI followed up with participants on their email diary responses to ask for clarification if their responses were unclear or required further elaboration.

Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique: Responding to the Collage

Storytelling: Tell me a story about who you think these women are and what their lives are like.

Missed images: Were there any feelings or thoughts about women's bodies that you couldn't find a picture to show or illustrate? What kind of picture would express that thought or feeling?

Construct elicitation: Pick three pictures that "stick out" to you. What is the same about these three pictures, and what is different? How do the pictures fit together?

Sensory images: Besides what you see when you look at your collage, what do you feel? Can you use taste, touch, smell, sound, and color to describe your feelings?

The summary image: Choose a single picture or group of pictures that best illustrates your overall thoughts about women's bodies in the media. How does this image represent your thoughts and feelings? Would you change the image if you could, and if so, how?

Sharing Final Thoughts and Feelings

Is there anything else you'd like to share with me before we finish our work together?

Is there anything that you've shared in your diaries and the interviews that you want to make sure that I include in the mini-magazine that you will get at the end of the study?

What has been the best part of participating in this study? What has been the hardest part?

The PI discusses logistics for the mini-magazine launch party.

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2006 B.A., Summa cum Laude, Magazine Journalism, University of Oregon

Professional Experience

2009-2011 Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Kentucky
ISC 261: Strategic Writing and Planning
COM 249: Mass Media and Culture
COM 325: Organizational Communication

2009-present Editor, Designer, and Contributing Writer, *Ripples in the Grande Ronde River* quarterly newsletter, Grande Ronde Model Watershed, La Grande, Oregon

2006-2009 Marketing Coordinator, Anderson-Perry & Associates, Inc., La Grande, Oregon

2005-2006 Lead Caller, University of Oregon Annual Giving Program, Eugene, Oregon

Academic Experience

2010 Research Assistant, R01 Grant Application PAR-09-153 (Tailored Information Program for Safer Sex Randomized Controlled Trial), University of Kentucky College of Communications and Information Studies, Lexington, Kentucky

2010-present Research Assistant, Project CREATE Web Resource Development (<http://comm.uky.edu/rcap>), Rural Center for AIDS/STD Prevention (RCAP), Indiana University/University of Kentucky

2010 Research Assistant, Project to Promote HPV Vaccination and Cervical Cancer Screening Among Young Adult Female Eastern Kentuckians, Rural Cancer Prevention Center and University of Kentucky College of Communications and Information Studies, Lexington, Kentucky

2006 Editor-in-chief, inFlux, Flux magazine online edition, University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication (<http://influx.uoregon.edu/2006>), Eugene, Oregon

2005-2006 Editorial Intern, *Oregon Quarterly*, the University of Oregon alumni magazine, Eugene, Oregon

- 2004 Reporting Intern, KEZI 9 News, ABC affiliate, Eugene, Oregon
- 2004 Production Intern, TV-3 Television, Accra, Ghana

Honors, Awards, and Fellowships

Outstanding Senior Woman of the Year Award, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon (2006)

Outstanding Magazine Student of the Year Award, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon (2006)

Presidential Scholarship, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon (2002-2006)

School of Journalism and Communication Scholarship, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon (2002-2006)

Oregon Scholarship and Assistance Committee (OSAC) Robert Byrd Honors Scholarship for Academic Achievement, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon (2002-2006)

Kappa Tau Alpha Journalism Honor Society, member (2005-2006)

Broadcast Education Association, Philo T. Farnsworth scholarship (2005-2006)

Warren C. Price Award for Best Communication History Paper, University of Oregon (2005)

African Studies Travel Scholarship, Accra, Ghana (2004)

Academic Work in Progress

McGladrey, M.L., Cohen, E.L., & Head, K.J. "Engaged elicitation" in cervical cancer prevention message development targeting underserved populations. Under review, *Critical Public Health*.

Cohen, E.L., Head, K.J., & McGladrey, M.L. Risk perceptions of the HPV vaccine: Differences between early adopters and non-adopters. Under review, *Journal of Health Communication*.

Head, K.J., Cohen, E.L., & McGladrey, M.L. Young women's perspectives on cervical cancer prevention in Kentucky Appalachia. Under review, *Qualitative Health Research*.

Cohen, E.L., Vanderpool, R., Crosby, R., Noar, S.M., Bates, W., Collins, T. Head, K.J., McGladrey, M., & Casey, B. 1-2-3 Pap: An HPV prevention campaign to reduce cervical cancer in Eastern Kentucky. In Kreps, G.L., & Dutta, M.J. (Eds.), *Reducing health disparities: Communication interventions*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Professional Publications

“Wastewater System Rehab,” *Civil Engineering (CE) News* magazine, June 2009
(http://www.cenews.com/magazine-article----wastewater_system_rehab-6584.html)

“Survey Approach Reduces Risk, Cost, and Traffic Delays,” *Professional Surveyor Magazine*, February 2008 (<http://www.profsurv.com/magazine/article.aspx?i=2066>)

“PROFile: Ronald Beghetto,” *Oregon Quarterly*, Autumn 2006

“Hip Hop Hopes,” *inFlux*, 2006

“PROFile: John Lysaker,” *Oregon Quarterly*, Summer 2006

“PROFile: Deborah Bauer,” *Oregon Quarterly*, Spring 2006

“PROFile: Joshua Roering,” *Oregon Quarterly*, Winter 2005

“I’m Ghana be in Television” *Student Traveler*, September 2005

“Traditional Dance in Modern Culture,” *Morning TV*, TV 3, Accra, Ghana, July 2004

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