

University of Nevada, Reno

**Body Talk: Fat is out, Fit is in**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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## Abstract

Many scholars have addressed the irreconcilable relationship between women and their bodies. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways women come to understand their bodies, and to account for one's social location in this construction of the body. Many studies that have focused on social class and women's bodies, lack a dimension on race. Those that have focused on race and women's bodies, lack any attention to social class. In many cases, the study of women's bodies in terms of race compares Black<sup>1</sup> women to White women. This perpetuates the view that White women are the standard to which all other women are judged. Allen (1998) explained the importance of hearing the voices of women of color without being in reference to White women's voices, "When we privilege the knowledge of the oppressed or outsiders, we reveal aspects of the social order that previously have not been exposed" (Allen, 1998, p. 577). Without analysis of class, we can assume then that this also reflects a White middle-class standard.

In order to address the role of race and class in shaping the social construction of women's bodies and to explain variation in body satisfaction among women from various backgrounds, this study implemented both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A survey was used to collect information about social class, race, and overall body satisfaction. The quantitative analysis is supplemented in-depth semi-structured interviews to thresh out the experiences and interactions, the words and the symbols that have accompanied the process of constructing the body. The results of the survey demonstrate the importance of feedback from family in shaping women's body

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<sup>1</sup> This literature review and data analysis will refer to African American women as "Black" to be consistent with survey instrument.

satisfaction, and the overwhelming importance of mothers or mother-figures in women's development. Yet, women who felt that their father or father-figure was important in their development also showed a significant relationship between feedback and body satisfaction, as well as the way they were able to recall that their father or father-figure spoke of other women's bodies and their body satisfaction. Survey respondents indicated that the ideal body was "Athletic" or "Curvy." Interview participants demonstrated a desire to "be fit." Overall, the data suggest that the thin-ideal has become a thing of the past, but questions remain about the emergence of the new fit ideal. Is the goal to "be fit" different from the goal to be thin? Is the new fit ideal just an approved discourse for the same social practices? How does the new language for body disciplinary practices change the interpretation and impact body satisfaction? The emergence of an apparent fit ideal among women is an important transition in body discourse that should continue to be explored.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	6
Research Question .....	31
Hypotheses .....	31
Methodology .....	33
Results.....	41
Quantitative Analysis.....	41
Qualitative Analysis.....	65
Discussion .....	93
Limitations .....	109
Future Research .....	109
Conclusions.....	111
Appendix I: Qualitative Recruitment Flyer .....	113
Appendix II: Qualitative Recruitment Screening .....	114
Appendix III: Quantitative Recruitment Flyer.....	115
Appendix IV: Semi-Structured Interview Questions.....	116
Appendix V: Qualitative Consent Sheet.....	117
Appendix VI: Quantitative Consent Sheet.....	118
Appendix VII: Fitspiration vs. Thinspiration.....	119
References.....	120

## Introduction

*“Dear Mum, I was seven when I discovered that you were fat, ugly and horrible. Up until that point I had believed you were beautiful—in every sense of the word.”* –Kasey

Edwards (2013)

It is inadequate to assess the experiences of girls, or women, without reference to their social location. The goal of the present research is to better understand the role of class and race in shaping the way women and girls come to know their bodies. *Dear Mum* is a compilation of letters from Australian celebrities, athletes, and authors to their mothers (Edwards, 2013). Kasey Edwards explains in this letter to her mother how she developed an understanding of her mother’s body as well as her own, “I learned that: (1) You must be fat because mothers don't lie (2) Fat is ugly and horrible (3) When I grow up I'll look like you and therefore I will be fat, ugly and horrible too” (Edwards, 2013).

Women and girls come to know their bodies through intimate interactions such as these.

Why should we care about these social constructions of women’s bodies? Why does it matter how women feel about their bodies? Research has shown that women’s body esteem, self-esteem, and self-image are intimately entwined (Neumark-Sztainer, et al., 2006; Secord & Jourard, 1953; Silberstein et al., 1988). If one’s body is considered to be important to the definition of the self, when there is a discrepancy between the perceived body and the idealized body one will resort to self-hate and result in diminished self-esteem (Silberstein et al., 1988). Secord and Jourard (1953) explained this relationship between regard for the self and satisfaction with one’s body by referring to the well-known dictum of William James, “that self-esteem is a ratio of pretension to achievement...women’s satisfaction with aspects of their bodies varies with the

magnitude of the deviation between measured size and what they consider ideal size” (p. 245). Therefore, body satisfaction is connected to the individual’s sense of an ideal body, and perception of achieving the ideal body. Furthermore, low body satisfaction among women is a predictor of dieting, disordered eating and other unhealthy weight control behaviors (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006). While some have assumed that low body satisfaction may promote healthy weight management, research shows that dissatisfaction is unhealthy, results in low self-esteem, and is “predictive of later signs of more global mental distress” (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006). As such, body satisfaction carries the potential for destruction.

The body is a symbol among women of femininity and social value. Naomi Wolf (1991) explained that “the beauty myth” serves to demean women by defining their value in their feminine beauty. Wolf concluded that as long as women put value and work into the endless pursuit of beauty, women’s advancement and aspirations in politics and work would be hindered (1991). Secord and Jourard (1953) argued, “that a woman’s status and security are in some cases highly conditioned by her perceived and demonstrated attractiveness to males—irrespective of her skills, interests, values, etc.; hence, if she does not feel or appear ‘beautiful,’ she feels a loss of self-esteem, i.e., insecure” (p. 246). These connections between the body and the self can be detrimental to women. Since low body satisfaction results in increased unhealthy weight control behaviors, these women are vulnerable to body modification practices that may inhibit or distract from other social goals. Success and mobility may be inhibited by this consuming practice to attain the ideal, and to be the ideal. This relationship between the self and the body is disempowering to women.

It has been said that, for women, the amount of dissatisfaction with one's body is "normative discontent" (Silberstein et al., 1988). But, are all women, of all social locations equally affected by this condition of "normative discontent"? There is a large literature on women's bodies regarding body image, body esteem, and body satisfaction but there seems to be a lack of focus on the way that women come to know their bodies within the context of class and race. Thus, the purpose of this study is to assess the relative generalizability of this "normative discontent" to all women, across all strata. The existing literature on women's bodies does not acknowledge, and inherently silences varying experience of the body and the self at the intersection of class and race. Diaconu-Muresan (2013) clearly outlined the alignment of identity and body among women, and the unreliability of past research for its White, middle-class orientation. It is important to acknowledge the past research that has shown how White, middle-class women shape their identity in relation to men in their lives, while women of color and low socioeconomic status are more likely to define their identities by family (as cited by Diaconu-Muresan, 2013). This exemplifies the importance of studying women's bodies at the intersection of class and race. One's structural and social location may affect the way one evaluates their body and comes to understand their body as part of the self.

Research on women and girls' bodies has tended to focus on gender and class (Austin, Haines, & Veugelers, 2009; Carolan, 2005; O'Dea & Caputi, 2001; Sobal & Stunkard, 1989) or gender and race (Cash & Henry, 1995; Harris, 2006; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Spurgas, 2005). With some exceptions, studies that focus on gender and race have shown repeatedly that African American women and girls tend to be more satisfied with their bodies while they also tend to have a higher body mass index (BMI)



score (as cited in Kelly et al., 2005). This correlation is often attributed to cultural differences based on race without any empirical support. The first, most important theoretical backbone of this research is that class and race intersect and inform our daily lives. Class and race are not hierarchical; one does not take precedent over the other. Patricia Hill-Collins' concept of "intersectionality" reverberates the idea that class and race in conjunction shape social experiences, and neither element can be ignored (Hill Collins, 2000).

Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class alludes to the ways in which we define symbols that represent dominant ideals, which leads into the final question of how we create meaning in the body. Previous studies have demonstrated the relationship between patterns of dieting and weight-related conversation within the family to shape girls' weight-changing behaviors (Al Sabbah et al., 2009; Kelly et al, 2005; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010; O'Dea & Caputi, 2001; Sobal & Stunkard, 1989). It has been repeatedly demonstrated that eating disorders among girls are influenced by parents who themselves diet, or encourage their daughters to diet. Parents play a primary role in child socialization and are thus responsible for situating the body in classed and raced locations. A number of questions about the relationship between society and the body emerge—do all parents everywhere send their daughters the same message, that the body is to be controlled, maintained, and thin? How do we develop meaning about our bodies? Does the constructed meaning about bodies impact level of body satisfaction? Do class and race matter in this social construction of the body? We can begin to address these questions from the theoretical orientation of social constructionism that has been advanced by Berger and Luckmann (1966).

This research will assess how women's body satisfaction is influenced by the way parents shape women's conception of the body and the self at the intersection of race and class. From this study we can begin to paint a more complete picture of how women relate to their bodies. This study will address the inadequacies of past research to address the critical relationship between class and race in the construction of the body.

In order to understand body satisfaction, we need to know how women develop an understanding of, and produce meaning in their bodies. This study looks at how the family acts as a filter in the social construction of the body. While the influence of the media is well noted in literature on body image, I argue that the family plays a major role in translating the meaning of the body at the intersection of race, class, and gender.

Consequently, the question it poses is, to what extent does the family influence one's assessment of their body? Body satisfaction among women may be a derivation of learned behavior within family interactions that are based on intersections of classed and raced constructions of reality. There are structural factors, ways of organizing families in the capitalist system, which might change the ways that we communicate the meaning of women's bodies as classed and raced. To conclude, the focus and complexities of the development of body satisfaction in women, as both classed and raced, lies in those interpersonal interactions and social constructions. I'm interested in assessing the ways in which a young woman comes to know her body through interactions in the family, intersecting with class and race. Primarily, how do these social locations shape the construction of the body as a reflection of self-worth, a vessel of self-esteem, self-hate, sexual deviance, and body dissatisfaction? How do race and class shape social constructions of women's bodies?

## Literature Review

### History of Women's Bodies

*"I would have girls regard themselves not as adjectives but as nouns..."*

–Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Our Girls*

From corsets to thong bikinis and push up bras, women's bodies have been consistently perverted by contraptions to enhance beauty throughout history. Cultural practices ranging from foot binding to photoshop have been used to control and manipulate women's bodies. Throughout time women have been subject to culturally symbolic chastity belts and glass ceilings. But women and girls in today's western society have constructed the body as an "all-consuming project" that make them stand apart from women and girls of the past (Brumberg, 1997, p. xvii). While every woman and girl has experienced some kind of anxiety about her body, cultural and historical settings set the stage for how women present themselves and act upon their bodies (Brumberg, 1997). Brumberg's analysis in *The Body Project*, an analysis of diary entries and oral histories by middle-class women and girls about their bodies, concluded, "The fact that American girls now make the body their central project is not an accident or a curiosity: it is a symptom of historical changes that are only now beginning to be understood" (p. xxv, 1997).

With each new century we can see the development of new forms of control or manipulation of women's bodies. During the early nineteenth century western societies put an emphasis on spiritual well-being rather than physical appearance (Brumberg, 1997). To discuss the body was impolite, yet women's bodies were still highly representative of social class and moral character (Brumberg, 1997). Women and girls of

the middle and upper social classes were likely to concern themselves with their body size and paid particular attention to hands and feet, “To be too large or too robust was a sign of indelicacy that suggested lower-class origins and a rough way of life” (p. xix-xx, Brumberg, 1997). It was well documented that the teen queen-to-be Victoria obsessed incessantly over her large hands and took extra steps to hide behind large rings and gloves, “A future queen after all, was not supposed to look like a husky milkmaid or mill girl, and her body must never imply that she did demanding physical labor” (p. xx, Brumberg, 1997). The corset was made popular during the nineteenth century to emphasize a small waist and an hourglass figure (Brumberg, 1997). Hands, feet, and waist lines were a determining characteristic of social class, but at the same time any woman who spent too much time at the vanity put her moral respectability on the line (Brumberg, 1997). One’s self-worth was intimately tied to faith in God, self-control, and charity or service to others. To focus on body imperfections would be self-indulgent, individualistic, and self-centered (Brumberg, 1997). In Brumberg’s (1997) analysis of the diaries of young women and girls, it is noted that during the nineteenth century there was rarely any statement about the body, or about a struggle for personal identity.

Brumberg (1997) noted the difference between two diary entries, one from an adolescent girl in 1892 and the other from a New Year’s resolution of an American girl in 1982. The adolescent from 1892 wrote:

“Resolved, not to talk about myself or feelings. To think before speaking. To work seriously. To be self-restrained in conversation and actions. Not to let my thoughts wander. To be dignified. Interest myself more in others” (p. xxi, Brumberg, 1997).

Nearly a century later, this New Year's resolution of an American girl in 1982 illustrates a transformation of the relationship between the self and the body:

“I will try to make myself better in any way I possibly can with the help of my budget and baby-sitting money. I will lose weight, get new lenses, already got new haircut, good makeup, new clothes and accessories” (p. xxi, Brumberg, 1997).

These diary entries demonstrate the transformation of the self from moral character to appearance (Brumberg, 1997). This transformation of the body reflects the cultural values of the historical period of society. In modern American culture, the pursuit of happiness comes through the manipulation of one's appearance, sometimes at an extreme cost, “many of us believe that by losing weight or getting a face-lift, we can become better people” (p. 5, Young, 2005). The nineteenth-century is marked by industrialization which can be characterized as modernization, urbanization, fast-paced growth and increased control over nature, and in the same vein, control over the body (Lowe, 1995). Cultural historian, Hillel Schwartz, noted the increasingly small tolerance for fat at the close of the nineteenth-century, and concluded that “slimming [was] the modern expression of an industrial society confused by its own desires and therefore never satisfied” (p. 38, as cited by Lowe, 1995).

As women began to attend universities in pursuit of higher education during the nineteenth century, there was a concern over the health of these young women taking on such a heavy burden (Lowe, 1995). There was an assumption that such pursuits would pose health risks because women could not handle the stressors of academia, and furthermore such engagement would strip women of their feminine appeal (Lowe, 1995). Weight maintenance, and particularly weight gain were equated to signs of “health,

abundance, or joviality” (p. 50, Lowe, 1995). During the 1800s, being plump was a sign of a heavy wallet at a time when famine was merely a symptom of lower class status (Lowe, 1995). As noted in *Our Bodies, Ourselves* fat is not intrinsically abhorrent, and in fact is a natural state of the female body including breasts and hips. Furthermore, “women who are too thin do not menstruate and cannot bear children,” so being fat was a sign of health (p. 13, Young, 2005). In many cultures throughout time, fat women represented fertility (Young, 2005). It was not until the 1920s, the decade of the flapper, that we began to see fatness was no longer medically valued or aesthetically pleasing (Brumberg, 1997; Lowe, 1995).

The roaring twenties for women were typified by the youthful short skirts, flat chests, and straight lines of the flapper style (Brumberg, 1997). The decade of the flapper fashion acted as a catalyst for the dieting industry we know today. As more scales moved into the home, “slimming” and “reducing” practices that we now refer to as “dieting” became increasingly commonplace (Brumberg, 1997; Lowe, 1995). Women’s relationship to food was no longer about health, it was about dieting (Lowe, 1995). Hillel Schwartz accurately portrayed the relationship between women, weight, and self-worth when he said, “weight began to carry with it a moral imperative...braced by the truth-telling powers of the scale” (p. 55, as cited by Lowe, 1995). The twenties also marked the growing popularity of beauty pageants, again illustrating that women’s worth was becoming equated with appearance, “a way to visibly announce who you are to the world” (p. 98, Brumberg, 1997). Flapper dresses and bathing suits of the 1920s revealed more of women’s bodies in the name of fashion (Brumberg, 1997). The fashion-trend toward “slimming” required a thick wallet and self-control (Brumberg, 1997; Lowe,

1995). In an analysis of Smith college female students and the transition toward dieting, Lowe concluded that dieting served as a demonstration of class status and modernity that became important in the new dating culture (1995). This in turn meant that fat became associated with lower class status and immigrants (Brumberg, 1997; Lowe, 1995). According to Laura Shapiro (2008), “there was a long-standing assumption that well-bred women were creatures with light, disinterested eating habits” (p. 68). Meanwhile a carnal and indulgent relationship with food signified low, working class status (Lowe, 1995).

The 1920s, the decade of the flapper, marked a distinct change in the value of women’s bodies as slender. The war on women’s bodies has continued to evolve. In the 1950s an additional concern over breast development and breast size emerged (Brumberg, 1997). Training bras for adolescent girls became ordinary, promoted by media and doctors, and even desired by young girls as a symbol of beauty and maturity (Brumberg, 1997). According to Brumberg (1997), “Breasts, not weight, were the primary point of comparison among high school girls in the 1950s” (p. 116). The 1950s cultural ideal could be embodied by the body of Marilyn Monroe, but in the 1960s there was a reemergence of the thin ideal that was exemplified by the well-known British model, Twiggy (Young, 2005).

At the end of the twentieth century, the “century of svelte,” there continued to be a pattern of body surveillance and manipulation, “the body projects of middle-class American girls are more habitual and intense than they were in either the late 1920s or the 1950s” (p. 119, Brumberg, 1997). Talking about dieting and talking about body parts have become too familiar. Women participate in “fat talk” about their thighs and their cellulite, “the nonmedical term for a kind of dimpled fat that appears on the legs and

derrieres of many mature women, not just those who are overweight” (p. 126-127, Brumberg, 1997). This “fat talk” is taken-for-granted, and “the sad truth is that many girls learn to hate their bodies by watching and listening to their mothers diet and talk about their bodies” (p. 15, Young, 2005). Brumberg (1997) suggested that middle-class American girls frequently are part of, or peripheral to this constant discussion and critique of women’s bodies. The subject of “fat talk” can include their own body as the subject of evaluation, it can be their mother’s body, their sister’s body, a celebrity’s body, or even a stranger’s body.

The number on the scale, and the tag on clothes have developed significant meanings about the self (Brumberg, 1997). While men’s pants sizes actually measure waist and inseam in inches, women’s sizes (i.e. 00, 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 20, 22, 24) represent arbitrary numbers and sizes and thus are open to subjective meaning. Women and girls may feel devalued by their clothing size or even refuse to wear something because they don’t want to be associated with that size regardless of fit (Brumberg, 1997). In 2013, the CEO of Abercrombie & Fitch in an interview explained that their brand was for “cool kids” the “attractive all-American kid with a great attitude and a lot of friends. A lot of people don’t belong [in our clothes], and they can’t belong. Are we exclusionary? Absolutely” (Lutz, 2013). Is it only a coincidence that Abercrombie does not make clothes for women in XL or XXL, or pants larger than a size 10? Are these the defining boundaries of what makes you “cool”?

Talking about women’s bodies is like talking about the weather, it is small talk and it is taken for granted. What is the cost of “fat talk”? Looking good is an expensive endeavor that requires time and money to maintain and transform the body. This



transformation has coincided with an expanding beauty industry that feeds on the body angst of women and girls. The greater the body dissatisfaction among women and girls, the greater corporate profits in dieting and cosmetic industries. While the products and procedures themselves are expensive, women and girls face a greater cost to their mental and physical health (Brumberg, 1997). This is problematic as noted by Brumberg (1997), “Adolescent girls today face the issues girls have always faced—Who am I? Who do I want to be?—but their answers, more than ever before, revolve around the body” (p. xxiv). Women and girls remain preoccupied with themselves as adjectives, thereby suppressing or ignoring meaningful pursuits for the sake of the body project (Brumberg, 1997).

It is interesting to consider the emergence and triumphs of the women’s rights movement that occurred during this transformation of women’s bodies and women’s worth. At the same time women were granted the right to vote, they were learning to value themselves for the number on a scale (Brumberg, 1997; Lowe, 1995). In *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Young, 2005) it is proposed that as women gained greater access to the world of men, their bodies have undergone greater scrutiny, “the message seems to be that our power as women may increase, but our physical bodies must shrink” (p. 13). Women’s power is equated to her appearance, and thus to take away her power all one must do is call her “fat”. “Fat” is the enemy in the war on women’s bodies, and it is the ultimate distraction. The obsession with thinness is used to control women with power, “fear of fat robs us of our pride and energy, causes conflict between women, and undermines our self-confidence” (p. 5, Young, 2005). This kind of control over women’s bodies is reproduced and taken for granted in “body talk” and the mass media.

The introduction of media in the twentieth century has created “new kinds of cultural mirrors” for self-criticism and self-hate (p. 72, Brumberg, 1997). Advertisements are considered the most powerful media messages because the average American is exposed to three thousand ads each day. Women presented in the media are overwhelmingly young, white, upper class, and thin (Young, 2005; Bordo, 1993). When there happens to be a woman of color presented in the media, she often still reflects the white thin ideal. One woman of color recalls, “as a teenager, I was obsessed with achieving the “white girl” look: slim hips, perky breasts, flat stomach. I hated that I didn’t look like white models in my magazines” (p. 11, Young, 2005). Oftentimes, the white thin ideal was a pursuit for white privilege (Young, 2005).

Women from various racial and social class backgrounds experience cultural ideals differently. In the content analysis of diaries, oral histories, and fiction studied by Brumberg (1997), skin color and complexion were intimately and superficially tied to constructions of race and class, oftentimes acting as barriers to assimilation. Skin color and skin complexion represented cleanliness, where light skin and a clear complexion represented high class and dark skin and pimples represented poverty, uncleanness, and groups who have been labeled as degenerates (Brumberg, 1997). According to the work by Brumberg (1997), Black and Jewish women and girls felt particularly vulnerable to stigma as unclean and in turn invested in the pursuit of “good skin” that would convey higher status socially and economically (p. 73). In the 1920s the diary of a fifteen year old Jewish girl had indicated, “that blemished or pitted skin—just like an unpronounceable family name—would handicap her because it was a sign of poverty and uncleanness, both of which were associated with lower-class status and newly arrived

immigrants” (p. 74, Brumberg, 1997). In addition to this preoccupation with clear skin was the fixation over skin color, and “passing” as white (Brumberg, 1997). There has been a successful market for skin bleachers, acne treatments, and hair straightening since the 1850s and each represent the classed and raced meanings attached to appearance in American society that mark difference among marginalized groups (Brumberg, 1997; Young, 2005).

### **Social Class and Race**

Why does social class matter? Sociologists often view social class as a categorical assignment based on annual household income, or be measurements of wealth, occupation, and education. These economic definitions of class do not inherently explain class difference. Social class also serves as a cultural identity that carries with it more than an arbitrary category. Social class defines the expectations for behavior and tastes. The influence of social class on women’s experiences is just as crucial as race, and the two identities work together to shape social experience.

What does social class mean, and why does it matter? Social class labels represent hierarchical power and social relations based on economic conditions. These constructed social relations based on economic classifications result in cultural difference for the sake of distinction. Many social researchers have been working to redefine our conception of class beyond the antagonistic and exploitative relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, with greater emphasis on how class defines cultural milieu and class tastes (Miller, 1958; Bottero, 2004; Devine & Savage, 1999). Bourdieu (1984) specifically noted the importance of taste and cultural preference in defining these classed identities. The cultural preferences of the lower classes are stigmatized and those preferences of the

middle and upper classes are deemed respectable (Bourdieu, 1984). This system of difference based on economic location is taken-for-granted, and is easily reproduced through cultural tastes. The body is just one symbolic representation of class status and Bourdieu (1984) explained “It does this first in the seemingly most natural features of the body, the dimensions (volume, height, weight) and shapes (round or square, stiff or supple, straight or curved) of its visible forms, which express in countless ways a whole relation to the body, i.e., a way of treating it caring for it, feeding it, maintaining it, which reveals the deepest dispositions of the habitus” (p. 190).

Class inequality takes place beyond the workplace, it is greater than economic relations, and it permeates everyday life. The economic conditions that have been used to determine class are tightly woven into one’s social identity. Bottero (2004) explained that our lives are shaped by the structural consequences or privileges of economic conditions, but the cultural importance of class to everyday life develops unobserved, without consciousness. Devine and Savage (1999) described the importance of shifting to an analysis of class that includes this cultural element, where we can begin to see how these constructions of class difference serve to reproduce inequality. From this new perspective of class as culture, Bottero (2004) explained, “The emphasis is not on the development (or not) of class consciousness, but rather on the classed nature of particular social and cultural practices” (p. 989). Social class shapes one’s way of knowing and disposition to act.

Why does race matter? Regardless of claims that we are in a colorblind state of society, race is a primary characteristic used to make judgments about others (Allen, 2010). Race is a category that reflects these arbitrarily defined variations in skin color,

hair texture, body type, and facial features (Allen, 2010). The arbitrary assignment to a race category is situated within historical, political, social, and economic systems of power (Allen, 2010). It is important to differentiate between race and ethnicity, although it seems that the two are often used interchangeably. Ethnicity reflects culture, “To elaborate, *ethnicity* refers to a common origin or culture based on shared activities and identity related to some mixture of race, religion, language, and/or ancestry” (Allen, 2010, p. 67). While ethnicity may incorporate certain groups of people based on race, race is a socially constructed category of social organization, thus, “race matters because it is an ongoing organizing principle of our lives” (Allen, 2010, p. 68). The organization of race categories reflects structural hierarchies that favor whiteness. Race represents socially constructed categories and can be theoretically and practically measured in similar fashion to social class.

Black feminist standpoint theorist Patricia Hill Collins explained that the dominant ideals of beauty reflect White standards, thereby overshadowing any difference of meaning for non-Whites (2000). This also serves to position the sentiments of non-Whites in opposition to the dominant ideal and label racial minorities and their ideals as the “Other” (Hill Collins, 2000). White women’s experiences are assumed to be the standard on which all women’s experiences are judged, and from which women of color deviate. This way of seeing women, and in particular the focus on experiences of women of color, reflects feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint theory does not speak to the experiences of all women in all social locations, but rather explicitly explores how specific groups of women share experiences of oppression based on the intersection of race, class and gender (Allen, 1998).

Class and race shape women's experiences, "being black and woman engenders complex ways of knowing and being" (Allen, 1998, p. 575). In the United States, class and race are so intertwined they cannot be isolated. According to 2012 U.S. Census data, 27.2% of those living in poverty are Black, 25.6% are Hispanic, and only 9.7% are White, not Hispanic (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2013). Some studies on body image that take measures for race/ethnicity don't take measures for socioeconomic status, and those focused on socioeconomic status often don't touch on race/ethnicity. Class, race, and gender shape one's way of knowing and behaving in the social world and yet, many researchers effortlessly conclude that race is a defining factor for difference of experience, knowing, and behaving. Without a blink, phenomena can be explained away as a racial divide. Rather than assume that the meaning of the body is the same across racial and socioeconomic lines? We must acknowledge that class and race are social constructions, requiring us to ask how constructions of class and race produce meaning in women's bodies? Simultaneously, how does the classed and raced meaning of the body impact body satisfaction?

### **Theory of the Leisure Class**

Veblen (2007) constructed the Theory of the Leisure Class in the late 1800s, "The term "leisure", as here used, does not connote indolence or quiescence. What it connotes is non-productive consumption of time" (Veblen, 2007, p. 43). His central thesis was that the middle and upper classes could afford leisure activity and invest in conspicuous consumption as a means to demonstrate class status. As Veblen was writing at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, upper middle class families invested in silver flatware and the men adorned their wives with fashion and accessories to illustrate their success (2007). Veblen

explained that through conspicuous consumption, individuals could portray their social status (Carolan, 2005). Wealthy men would withdraw their wives and daughters from productive work; this was not a luxury that working class families could afford. If working class women disengaged from productive labor outside the home, it was for a different purpose, it was to take care of the family, housework, etc. Class is demonstrated by the display of things, adornments, vacations, housekeepers, and all of these “leisure” activities can be yielded to those who can financially afford it (Veblen, 2007). These leisure activities and objects mark class difference. Time and resources become tools for demonstrating power and prestige through the consumption of luxurious things.

Veblen’s formulation of conspicuous consumption reflects the incessant need of upper class people to demonstrate class status (2007). This demonstration of class status changes over time. In the 1800s being overweight symbolized class status because fatty meals were expensive. However, Veblen (2007) also noted that as the economy flourished so did the constructions of conspicuous consumption, “As wealth accumulates, the leisure class develops... a more or less elaborate system of rank and grades” (p. 76). Carolan (2005) writes about the ways in which conspicuous consumption has evolved into the “conspicuous body” (p. 84).

Carolan (2005) argues that today’s conspicuous consumption is transmitted through the display of our bodies. Control and manipulation of bodies is about status, power, and capitalism (Carolan, 2005). Carolan (2005) explains how the meaning of diet has changed from what one could eat, into what types of foods should be limited (Carolan, 2005). In the early 1900’s when food supplies became more stable, being overweight became a less effective status symbol (Carolan, 2005). Claire Cassidy, an

anthropologist, said that for Western women in the twentieth century, “slenderness symbolizes the freedom from want...The wealth...are able to switch the bodily metaphor of success from fat to thin because they do not need to worry about famine or infectious disease” (p. 43, Lowe, 1995). Being able to control and moderate eating habits became a symbol of “civility, refinement, and sophistication” (Carolan, 2005, p. 86). Previously being overweight was associated with a healthy bank account; today the thin-ideal is a representation of status and wealth (Carolan, 2005).

Veblen explained that the conspicuous consumption patterns of the wealthy would persist beyond establishment of comfort; “If, as is sometimes assumed, the incentive to accumulation were the want of subsistence or of physical comfort, then the aggregate economic wants of a community might conceivably be satisfied at some point in the advance of industrial efficiency; but since the struggle is substantially a race for reputability on the basis of an invidious comparison, no approach to a definitive attainment is possible” (Veblen, 2007, p. 32). Veblen’s ideas about conspicuous consumption can be used to analyze the body project. The body project is the incessant need of women to manipulate and control their bodies as a means to demonstrate status. Paying for a gym membership, fitness trainer, plastic surgery, and organic nutritious foods is expensive and not attainable by all groups of people (Carolan, 2005). Beyond financial resources, the conspicuous thin body of today requires time for exercise and cooking (Carolan, 2005). Clearly, the conspicuous body represents class strata in which “a muscular worked-out body also (typically) implies a well worked-out wallet” (Carolan, 2005, p. 96). Moreover, the body becomes a tool that can be manipulated as a means to advance one’s social status. The body project is the leisure activity of the 21<sup>st</sup>



century that includes control of the body, investment in the beauty industry, dieting practices, and gym activity as a means to convey social status even without the conscious effort of the individual to do so.

### **The Body Project**

The “body project” represents the historical pressure on women to manipulate and control their bodies that also hold psychological and emotional consequences (Brumberg, 1997). It would seem that the wealthy, or the leisure class, could afford to commit time and resources to the “body project” (Brumberg, 1997). The beauty industry has successfully marketed cellulite creams, skin lighteners, hair dyes, and plastic surgery by poking at the insecurities of women from all backgrounds. Altogether, women invest \$43 billion each year in the beauty industry (Young, 2005). According to an article in the New York Times, in 2011 Americans spent \$62 billion in the weight loss market for gym memberships, weight management programs, exercise videos, and diet soda (Singer, 2011).

A national study conducted by Gallup of 3,027 national adults from 2003 to 2005 illustrates the positive relationship between surplus income and exercise, “Americans residing in higher income households are more likely than those living in lower income households to exercise frequently” (2005). Of those who indicated earning an annual income less than \$30,000, only 24% reported engaging in vigorous physical activities three to seven days per week, while 35% of those earning \$75,000 or more per year reported the same level of activity (Carroll, 2005). Women from upper classes have access to resources such as gym memberships, dieting programs, physical trainers, and may be more educated on how to lead healthier and more nutritious lifestyles (Sobal &

Stunkard, 1989). This may contribute to the inverse relationship between obesity and socioeconomic status (Sobal & Stunkard, 1989).

Sobal and Stunkard (1989) reviewed the literature on socioeconomic status and obesity to show the ways in which obesity is more than a genetic disposition, but rather a disposition of structural class differences. Past research has shown how low socioeconomic status and rural residency have been associated with high BMIs (as cited in Austin, Haines, & Veugeliers, 2009; McGeeney & Mendes, 2013). Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds were least likely to receive weight control advice and were twice as likely to be overweight compared to peers in middle or upper socioeconomic classes (O’Dea & Caputi, 2001). Sobal and Stunkard (1989) explain that obesity among parents is a predictor of obesity in their children, and that values of physical activity and eating practices are part of the socialization process.

Past research by Rosenbaum found that young girls internalized the thin-ideal as being synonymous with being attractive (as cited in Sobal & Stunkard, 1989). Hill and Lynch took this a step further to suggest that since the thin-ideal is primarily applied to women, this standard becomes incorporated into their gender expectation and through the process of socialization thinness is rewarded (as cited in Sobal & Stunkard, 1989). According to a Gallup study of American adults conducted in 1999, 70% of those surveyed indicated the importance of physical attractiveness “in terms of...happiness, social life, and the ability to get ahead,” (Newport, 1999). In developed westernized societies, where thinness is a cultural ideal among women and obesity is stigmatized, being thin becomes a tool for social mobility through marriage and career advancement (Sobal & Stunkard, 1989). The Midtown Study by Goldblatt et al. analyzed relationships

between social mobility and obesity and found that women who have experienced upward mobility over the course of their life were much thinner than those who remained in the same socioeconomic position or those who had experienced downward mobility (as cited in Sobal & Stunkard, 1989). The extent to which women and girls accept and internalize this standard of beauty is associated with socioeconomic position (Sobal & Stunkard, 1989). The obsessive preoccupation with the “body project” holds several negative consequences for women and girls from all backgrounds including eating disorders, skin bleaching, and low body-esteem (Brumberg, 1997).

### **Research on Women’s Bodies**

Women and girls learn to control and manipulate the body for the sake of the “body project” and simultaneously connect their identity to their body. The body becomes a visual representation of self-worth, and body satisfaction is a measure of one’s evaluation of that quality based on cultural ideals (Sira & Ballard, 2009). When a woman perceives a difference between what she sees in the mirror and what she sees on a billboard, she may experience body dissatisfaction (Sira & Ballard, 2009). Body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and lowered self-esteem are all heavy consequences of the body project. Talking about the body, obsessing over the body, controlling and manipulating the body has put women at war with their bodies. This brings up several questions about how identity and social location may impact experiences of women. Are all women from all backgrounds fighting the same war? Does the body hold the same meaning for women of all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds?

A national survey of 803 women conducted in 1993 found race to be a significant factor in body image (Cash & Henry, 1995). Black women reported having a more

positive body image than White and Hispanic participants (Cash & Henry, 1995). Other studies have shown that Blacks and Hispanics are far less likely to internalize the thin ideal than Asians or Whites (Shaw et al., 2004). Studies that have paid close attention to the experiences of Asian Americans and Native Americans have assessed lower levels of body satisfaction as a product of difficulty in acculturation (Miller, 2001; Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999). Mintz and Kashubeck (1999) found that Asian American women reported having low levels of satisfaction with racially defining features such as their eyes and height. Mintz and Kashubeck (1999) explained, “Asian American women’s lower satisfaction with their eyes and faces as compared to Caucasian women may be related to their status as a minority whose facial features are in opposition to the White standard of beauty held in our culture” (p. 792). The same explanation has been offered for the way Native American women relate to their bodies. Clougher (2013) examined the meager amount of research on Native American women’s body image, but ultimately found mixed results. Some research shows that Native Americans define beauty on their own terms, and other research suggests that minority status in a White society that values thinness has shaped Native American women to have the highest levels of dissatisfaction with their bodies compared to White, Black, Asian, and Latina women (Clougher, 2013). As women of color are pressured to blend into the white canvas of the United States, they either take unhealthy routes to the White thin ideal or manifest their own cultural definitions of beauty.

In research addressing body satisfaction and race, the results have indicated that White women are more likely than Black women to be dissatisfied with their bodies and develop eating disorders (as cited in Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Sira & Ballard, 2009).

This difference exists even though Black women tend to weigh more than White women. Past research has shown that the body ideal among White women is thinner, and White women are more likely to diet and claim that they are too fat compared to claims of Black women (Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2002). This difference has been attributed to cultural constructions that differ by race. Some have noted that Black women find fuller figures to be ideal, or more generally exhibit a greater acceptance for various body types because the thin ideal is representative of White culture (as cited in Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Sira & Ballard, 2009).

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argued that as Black women become conscious of their otherness, they find new ways of defining beauty. Kelch-Oliver and Ancis (2011) and Spurgas (2005) found that while many Black women readily abandoned the thin ideal for a more curvaceous one, this was not without other social and interpersonal elements including the role of men, family, and peer groups in shaping their body satisfaction. Rubin, Fitts, and Becker (2003) studied the beauty ideals of Black and Latina women and found that discussions of the body more often reflected spirituality, self-respect, and health. In this study, Latina women indicated altering habits for the sake of health rather than for the purpose of losing weight due to a presence of health problems among their family members (Rubin, Fitts, Becker, 2003). This is different from aesthetic ideals of thinness found among White women. The “body ethics” of women of color combat dominant ideas about body aesthetics (Rubin, Fitts, & Becker, 2003). Rubin, Fitts, and Becker (2003) explained that women of color must navigate their identity that straddles two cultures and by reflecting on body ethics are able to resist dominant ideas about women’s bodies that are demeaning and distracting. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) would

suggest that it would be equally important to assess the role of social class identities in shaping the way women of color come to know their bodies.

Harris (2006) noted that varying values of the body do not shield Black and Latina women from experiencing dissatisfaction or eating disorders, despite their fluid ideals about the body. Therefore, women of color are not immune to the dominant White thin ideal and race is not the only defining feature of this experience and relation to the body. This demonstrates how body satisfaction may exist in relation to raced definitions of beauty, but also be influenced by more interpersonal relationships and social environments. Upper class women and girls are more likely to have eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, and in general are more likely to diet (Sobal & Stunkard, 1989). Anorexia nervosa, previously thought to be a Western cultural battle, now affects women around the world and is most closely associated with increased social and economic well-being in the direction of Western values (Cheney, 2010).

Some researchers have suggested that the recent upward social mobility of Black women is correlated with greater body dissatisfaction and disordered eating as they enter the social circle of White middle-class ideals (as cited in Harris, 2006). In fact, many featured stories in a magazine that target middle-class Black women are about body dissatisfaction and disordered eating, suggesting that the White ideal becomes more pressing as wealth increases among Black women (Brumberg, 1997). Cheney (2010) conducted in-depth interviews with ethnically diverse college women whose narratives demonstrated the ways in which “the body is a vehicle for social mobility and is used by women from marginalized identities to strategically negotiate social inequalities embedded in daily social relationships and interactions that more privileged women do

not encounter” (p. 1347). Practices used to become thin are thus a means to attaining power (Cheney, 2010). This research and the presented history of women’s bodies demonstrates how the meaning of the body is a construction situation in time and location.

### **Social Construction of Reality**

Social constructionism was introduced to the field of sociology in the 1960s by Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). Social construction of reality is an important theoretical orientation that has guided this research project. Instead of seeing social experiences and definitions as intrinsic, constructionists acknowledge “the dynamic contours of social reality and the processes by which social reality is put together and assigned meaning... participants actively construct the world of everyday life and its constituent elements” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 3). The social constructionist perspective forces sociologists to approach taken-for-granted phenomena as situated within history, hierarchical structures, and social interactions (Allen, 2007). May and Mumby (2005) elaborate, “that meaning arises from social systems rather than individual members of society” (p. 35). Berger and Luckmann’s work on social constructionism focused on language as a tool for communicating these constructed meanings through socialization (1966). In short, social interactions shape identity and social reality drawing of course on the work of George H. Mead and Charles Cooley. However, social reality is not realized universally. Social constructions are molded around time, place, and often serve to reinforce dominant hierarchical systems of organizing social life (May & Mumby, 2005).

### **Family Socialization**

Social constructionism and interactionist theory are both important theoretical perspectives in understanding how we produce meaning in our social world. Symbolic interaction theory developed in the early twentieth century by Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead provide an important basis for studying interactions within the family. Cooley (1992) theorized the looking-glass self to explain how one comes to construct their view of the self through an interpretation of interactions with significant others. Cooley (1992) suggested that the development of the self is composed of three elements. First, one imagines how they must appear to others. Second, one imagines how the other is judging them. This may be deduced by direct or indirect cues, straightforward comments or body language can be of equal importance in this stage. It is important to emphasize that this process of developing the self is based on one's imagination. These first two elements of the looking-glass self are often referred to as "metaperceptions" because they are one's perceptions of another person's perception (p. 299, Cook & Douglas, 1998). From the perspective of symbolic interaction it does not matter what the intentions are of the other person in the social interaction, the self is reliant on one's interpretation of the social interaction. The third element of the looking-glass self is when one develops the self by taking into account the positive or negative judgments that have been perceived.

Mead (2009) followed the work of Cooley and honed in on the self as object and the self as process. Ultimately, Mead argued that the self emerges from the social. For Mead, the self was enhanced through language, game, and role-taking. In everyday life we use language and gestures to convey meaning. Through role-taking one can experience and practice the expectations and interactions of a significant other. During a



game, one must follow rules and be aware of their role and the role of other participants. During these types of interactions and activities one must anticipate expectations and reactions by assuming the position of the generalized other (Mead, 2009). The generalized other does not refer to a specific significant other as proposed by the theory of the looking-glass self, but instead to others more generally.

These theories of the self suggest that the self is constructed from social interactions that shape behavior. Not all interactions are created equal, “Parents presumably have more impact than neighbors, lovers than enemies” (p. 278, Lundgren, 2004). Closeness can impact how one accepts or rejects feedback (Lundgren, 2004). Both Cooley and Mead acknowledged the importance of family interactions in developing the self. Through family interactions we come to understand and internalize gendered expectations, “From the moment we are a *pretty little girl* in a *cute dress*, and our brother is a *big strong boy* who is *smart*, we learn what society expects from us” (p. 3, Young, 2005). “Doing gender,” an expression coined by West and Zimmerman (1987), exemplifies the interactionist approach in which social interactions provide a stage for practicing and presenting oneself in gendered ways.

Gender expectations are constantly being produced and reproduced through family interactions (Wharton, 2012). The interactionist perspective puts an emphasis on the interactions and social situations that reinforce social norms. Amy Wharton explained that gender matters in defining social boundaries for behavior, social interaction, and organizes social institutions (2012). Gendered identities are shaped by others, and emerge within social situations. Wharton (2012) explains gender socialization as, “the processes through which individuals take on gendered qualities and characteristics and acquire a

sense of self” (p. 37). As agents of socialization, parents are responsible for transmitting cultural messages and provide feedback on gender appropriate behavior and expectations.

The messages conveyed in socialization are by no means universal in nature. First, the different agents of socialization (i.e. parents, peers, media, and institutions) may provide conflicting feedback. Furthermore, the cross-sections of gender and race, or gender and social class, or other categories of difference, result in women experiencing socialization differently (Wharton, 2012). Some homes may be more reliant on gender stereotypes and highly differentiated gender performance in their daily lives. Wharton (2012) explained that difference in socialization messages and experience by race and social class may be a result of those from dominant social groups maintaining and reproducing traditional social norms. A study by Bardwell, Cochran, and Walker (1986) found that white children from higher social class backgrounds were more likely to support gender stereotypes than children from lower social classes and African American children. Meanings about gender and about expectations are transmitted within the family and are transmitted based on the layered, situated location of the family within the hierarchical social structure.

### **Family Impact on Body Satisfaction**

There has been research on how parents influence body satisfaction in their children, but a lack of focus on the impact of class and race. Past studies have found that girls who reported higher levels of body satisfaction were less likely to have been encouraged to diet by a family member (Kelly et al, 2005; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010). However, Kelly et al. found that specific types of communication are more beneficial than others (2005). Kelly et al. (2005) noted the importance of the family

communicating health goals as opposed to weight-oriented goals. The biggest indicator for poor body esteem was pressure from family members to lose weight (Ata et al., 2007).

Al Sabbah et al. (2009) noted the role of parents, especially mothers, as the main source of health information for adolescents. This research also notes the importance of mothers in shaping their adolescent daughters' attitudes and behaviors about the body and health practices (Al Sabbah et al., 2009). Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2010) set out to look at how parents who diet, talk about weight, or tease about weight put their daughters at risk for weight-related issues. The role of mothers was more significant than fathers in the development of weight-related issues among their daughters (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010). While Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2010) and Al Sabbah et al. (2009) found little association between how fathers talked about weight and their daughters' weight-related issues, more research could be done to explore this relationship. In particular, how do a father's comments about other women affect their daughter's understanding of women's bodies? More generally, how are these messages about bodies and weight transmitted to children? The research conducted by Al Sabbah et al. (2009) and Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2010) indicates that talking about weight around children is detrimental to their mental and physical health. However these studies do not address the role of class or race in body satisfaction or body discourse in the family.

### **Research Question**

The overarching question is: (How) do interactions in the family act as a filter for classed and raced messages about women's bodies, thus influencing body satisfaction as a classed and raced phenomena? This research question can be broken down into three distinct parts: (1) How do we develop meaning in our bodies through body discourse in the family? (2) How is the construction of the body influenced by race and class identities? (3) How does the construction of the body impact body satisfaction? Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were developed:

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is a negative relationship between social class and body satisfaction.
2. There is a relationship between racial category and body satisfaction.
3. There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's mother or mother-figure makes about the subject's body and her body satisfaction.
4. There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's mother or mother-figure makes about her own body and the subject's body satisfaction.
5. There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's father or father-figure makes about the subject's body and her body satisfaction.
6. There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's father or father-figure makes about his own body and the subject's body satisfaction.
7. There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's father or father-figure makes about other women's bodies and the subject's own personal body satisfaction.

8. Comments made by the mother or mother-figure will prove to be the most significant of family interactions that influence the subject's body satisfaction.
9. There is a positive relationship between the positivity of comments about the subject's body made by a sibling and the subject's body satisfaction.
10. There is a negative relationship between dieting and body satisfaction.
11. There is a negative relationship between serious consideration of cosmetic alterations to the body and body satisfaction.

## **Methodology**

The present study aims at gaining insight to the ways that young women learn about their bodies as classed and raced bodies, and how this may impact body satisfaction. Because the purpose of this research is in-depth understanding of the meanings constructed about the body in specific social and structural locations, a qualitative research design will compliment quantitative data collection. Thus, the bulk of the data was collected using a self-administered survey, semi-structured interviews provided depth, context, and elaboration on the quantitative data. The research design is composed of two distinct stages. In the subsequent paragraphs, I describe the methodological process of data collection including the characteristics and recruitment of participants, and the procedures for collecting quantitative and qualitative data.

### **Participants**

Participants included young adult women (between the ages of 18 and 25), with diverse ethnic and social class backgrounds attending the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) or Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC). While other demographic variables including, but not limited to, disability status and sexual orientation may influence one's relation to her body, these characteristics are not the primary interest of this study. This research addresses the experiences of young adult women from various social classes and racial categories. The expectation is to reveal mechanisms of developing meaning in the body through family interactions that represent race and class identities.

The purpose of selecting young adult women between the ages of 18 and 25 is to eliminate any difference in social experience based on generational gaps. While an extension of this study to address the social construction of the aging process as classed and raced would be valuable, that is not the goal of this study. Since we are asking participants to recall the messages they have received about their bodies through adolescence, it is important that they are able to readily recall these instances. In the same vein, women who are mothers will be explicitly excluded even if they fall in the appropriate age range. One of the first scholarly articles displayed when conducting an online scholarly search for “motherhood and body” is an article titled “Getting Your Body Back” followed by articles oriented towards health, whereas, a search of “girls and body” produces a list of articles related to body image and body dissatisfaction. This demonstrates the change in perception of women’s bodies at motherhood. Motherhood shapes social constructions of reality just as gender, race, and class do. Again, this is not the central concern of the proposed research. Motherhood is a separate intersecting identity, which would transform one’s relationship to her body.

### **Recruitment Methods**

Since this research was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative measures, the recruitment method is also composed of two parts. Fifteen volunteers were recruited from different racial categories (Black, Latina, White) and from various social class backgrounds to participate in in-depth interviews. Recruitment included actively getting in touch with various diversity clubs on-campus both at UNR and TMCC, posting flyers on bulletin boards at both schools (See Appendix I: Qualitative Recruitment Flyer), and networking with friends and acquaintances. All information distributed by these

means called for participants in a “study about women’s bodies” and included criteria for participation (i.e., women between the ages of 18 and 25, who are not mothers). In addition, recruitment material outlined the study procedures, specifically their participation in an interview about experiences in constructing meaning in the body, a supplementary survey, and the expected amount of time commitment of participation. The information specified that all interviews are conducted in English, recorded, and participation would remain anonymous in data reporting. Finally, all recruitment information distributed included the phone number and email of the researcher for those interested in participation. As an incentive, each participant interviewed was offered \$5 as a thank you. Prior to scheduling an interview, each participant was screened to ensure their eligibility for participation and to avoid over-representing one category in the sample. The screening script included questions about age, race, and class (See Appendix II: Qualitative Recruitment Screening). Once eligibility was determined and an interview had been scheduled, the interview participant was sent via email the questionnaire for demographic and body satisfaction data. Many interview participants were volunteers from the pilot test who had indicated an interest in further participation.

The recruitment method for the quantitative portion of this study is much more open. Using the SONA system at UNR, a self-administered online survey was used to collect data from a diverse sample of female students. The SONA System Pool is a campus-wide program that gives access to students to participate in social research. The original goal for sufficient data analysis called for about 30 participants from each intersection of the racial categories of interest (Black, Latina, White) and class category (Lower class, Middle class, Upper class). However, the actual sample had little racial



diversity. The SONA listing for this survey read, “This study includes a survey of women between the ages of 18 and 25, who are not mothers. The survey included questions about body satisfaction and family interactions about the body.” In addition to using SONA, a flyer with survey information was directly sent to gatekeepers of diversity clubs on-campus at UNR and TMCC (See Appendix III: Quantitative Recruitment Flyer).

### **Procedures**

Through interviews, we were able to assess context and content of body talk the participants experienced within the family structure. Semi-structured interviews included prepared questions as well as follow-up questions when elaboration or clarification is needed (See Appendix IV: Semi-Structured Interview Questions). The questions guided the interview to ensure that specific topics regarding the body were addressed. Thus, the qualitative data reflect a “reconstructed biography” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) in which participants were asked to articulate and define their own constructions of their bodies integrated in their own family socialization. Adamson and Donovan’s guide for multicultural social research explains, “The production of reflexive accounts is essential in all qualitative research projects but particularly in research involving ethnic minorities or ‘other’ groups” (p. 823). The in-depth interviews allowed for a fluid, detailed, and intricate explanation of constructed meaning in the body by sharing personal stories, experiences, and interactions that take place in the family. While the family may not be the most influential element, it is a primary actor in the socialization process. Participants were provided an informative consent sheet that detailed the study procedures while ensuring their anonymity (See Appendix V: Qualitative Consent Sheet). Each participant was informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any time. In order to ensure

confidentiality all qualitative participants were given a pseudonym, and asked to not mention any real names and identifiers. All interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy of data reporting. Interviews were held in private rooms at the UNR Knowledge Center. The semi-structured interview questions were formulated out of the study's research question. These open-ended questions are derived from the survey questions but will be used to elicit a deeper understanding of these interactional processes. Each participant in the qualitative portion of this study, also completed the survey used in the quantitative approach.

The quantitative portion of this study included an informative consent sheet for respondents to indicate their consent and eligibility before completing the survey questions (See Appendix VI: Quantitative Consent Sheet). Again, participants were informed of the survey procedures and their right to end participation at any time. The survey was used to capture information about participants' overall body satisfaction, family interactions about the body, and demographic background. The survey included a measure of self-reported body satisfaction using the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) developed by Cooper et al. (1987). The BSQ was constructed to measure one's concern with body shape and size among adults (Cooper et al., 1987). The original questionnaire was comprised of 34-items, though other shortened versions have been approved and tested by the authors (Cooper et al., 1987). For the purposes of this study, the BSQ-16a survey composed of 16 questions was used to measure body shape satisfaction. Each item is scored as "Never" (1), "Rarely" (2), "Sometimes" (3), "Often" (4), "Very Often" (5), and "Always" (6) (Cooper et al., 1987). Then by adding the score of all items answered, each participant is given an overall score. The score range is from 16 to 96. Those with a

score less than 38 indicates no concern with shape, a score from 38 to 51 indicates a mild concern with shape, a score from 52 to 66 indicates a moderate concern with shape, and a score over 66 indicated a marked concern with shape (Cooper et al., 1987). The BSQ-16 provides one measure of body shape satisfaction.

The Body Satisfaction Survey (BSS) developed for my undergraduate thesis on body satisfaction among college students (Martinez, 2013), was used to measure satisfaction with specific body parts. The BSS measures level of satisfaction (Very Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, and Very Satisfied) with 14 body features including Muscle Tone, Breasts, Nose, Legs, Hips, Lips, Arms, Weight, Butt, Height, Feet, Stomach, Eyes, and Back. The BSS was coded into a scale variable used to evaluate body satisfaction among participants. In order to explore possible difference in body ideals, two questions were asked about the ideal body for women (Androgynous, Athletic, Skinny, Strong, or Curvy) and what celebrity exemplifies this ideal.

Additional questions were asked to assess the types of messages exchanged in the family about women's bodies. The questionnaire included an assessment of perceived comments as positive or negative from mothers and fathers, as well as mother- and father-figures, and siblings. First, it is important to know that survey respondents only answered questions about family members who they perceived as important in their development. For those family members that the participant indicated were important in their development, respondents were asked questions about interactions and were aimed at measuring the ways in which women's bodies (including the participant's body) are talked about in the family. The body satisfaction measures were assessed with measures

of social class that included measures of income, education, and occupation. The participant was asked to identify the level of education and type of occupation held by each parent figure. In addition, the participant was asked to indicate what social class they think they were raised in (i.e. lower class, working class, lower-middle class, upper-middle class, upper class). These are arbitrary categories that will not be defined for the participant. This provides insight to what they imagine their social class standing was as a child. To follow up this question, the participant was asked to indicate whether they think they are likely to be in the same, lower, or higher social class as their parent figures. This depicts whether or not these women see themselves as socially mobile. These questions reflect how participants have constructed their social location. Then to measure a more gradational indicator of class the participant was asked to indicate their childhood household annual income (i.e. less than \$20,000, \$20,000 to \$39,999, \$40,000 to \$69,999, \$70,000 to \$124,999, \$125,000 to \$199,999, or more than \$200,000). These among other demographic measures were collected to categorize each participant by race and social class.

The hypotheses will each be measured by specific questions within the survey. The BSQ-16 and BSS scale will both be used to measure body satisfaction, and social class measures include income, mobility, and social class category. Survey respondents were asked to indicate which family member had the greatest influence on their body satisfaction, their mother, mother-figure, father, father-figure, sibling, or other. The respondents had to respond to a series of questions about body discourse interactions with this family member. Next, respondents were asked if there were any additional family members from the list provided that also had a significant impact on their development.

This allowed each participant to only provide information about body discourse interactions for those family members that they felt were significant. Feedback from family members are measured as “Extremely Negative,” “Mostly Negative,” “Mixed Messages,” “Mostly Positive,” or “Extremely Positive.” Additional information was acquired from interview participants in order to gain greater insight to quantitative trends.

## Results

### Quantitative Analysis

**Descriptive Statistics.** There were 148 respondents to the survey. The average age of respondents was 20.7 years old. Despite my efforts to reach out to diversity clubs and organizations on-campus the sample of survey respondents primarily identified as White (See Table 2). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the three social class measures including how the respondent classified themselves into a social class category, annual household income, and perception of ending up in a lower, same, or higher social class than their parents.

*Table 1: Descriptive Stats on Social Class Measures*

<i>Descriptive Data</i>		
<b>Social Class (n=138)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Lower class	3	2.2%
Working class	18	13.0%
Lower-Middle class	33	23.9%
Upper-Middle class	82	59.4%
Upper class	2	1.4%
<b>Income (n=135)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Less than \$20,000	9	6.7%
\$20,000-\$39,999	14	10.4%
\$40,000-\$69,999	29	21.5%
\$70,000-\$124,999	49	36.3%
\$125,000-\$200,000	18	13.3%
More than \$200,000	16	11.9%
<b>Social Mobility (n=137)</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Lower	5	3.6%
Same	75	54.7%
Higher	57	41.6%

**Table 2: Descriptive Stats on Race Category**

<i>Descriptive Data</i>		
Race Category (n=138)	n	(%)
Black	2	1.4%
Native American	2	1.4%
Asian	7	4.7%
Latina	13	8.8%
White	104	70.3%
Other	10	6.8%

**Level of Analysis.** The primary research objectives of this research are to assess the role of family members in shaping body satisfaction, and to assess how this is impacted by social location. A Pearson correlation will also be used to assess the relationship between variables. Correlation represents a relationship between two variables but does not explain causality. The strength of correlations can be determined by the correlation coefficient (.00-.19 very weak, .20-.39 weak, .40-.59 moderate, .60-.79 strong, .80-1.0 very strong). When one variable is dichotomous, an independent samples t-test will be used to compare means. The following analysis shows the descriptive statistics and significant correlations for the measures of body satisfaction, body discourse, and body discipline in an attempt to address the research question and each individual hypothesis.

**H1: There is a negative relationship between social class and body satisfaction.** Body Satisfaction Survey scores (BSS Scores) ranged from as low as 17 and as high as 56. With 14 components of the Body Satisfaction scale, the lowest possible score of 14 would indicate that someone was very dissatisfied with all 14 body features, and the highest possible score of 56 indicates that someone is very satisfied with all 14 body features measured. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the three

measurements of body satisfaction including the BSQ-16 results for body shape satisfaction and the BSS scores.

***Table 3: Descriptive Stats on Body Satisfaction Measures***

*Descriptive Data*

BSQ-16 Results (n=135)	n	(%)
No concern with shape	28	20.7%
Mild concern with shape	42	31.1%
Moderate concern with shape	41	30.4%
Marked concern with shape	24	17.8%
<b>BSS Score (n=140)</b>		
Minimum	17	
Maximum	56	
Mean	39.2	
Skewness	-.246	

A Pearson correlation test was run to determine if there was a relationship between social class measures including perceived social class, perceived social mobility, and childhood household annual income with body satisfaction measures. There was no significant relationship between social class, income, or perceived social mobility and body satisfaction measures, thus Hypothesis 1 is not supported. This may be due to the respondents' intersecting identity as a college student. Most respondents believed they would end up in the same or higher social class as their parents. Respondents' perceived social mobility and identity as a college student may diminish the influence of social class measures including childhood household income and perceived social class.

**H2: There is a relationship between racial category and body satisfaction.**

Due to a lack of racial diversity in the survey sample, there can be no analysis of how race impacts body satisfaction or body discourse in this analysis. Hypothesis 2 cannot be



tested with this dataset. With that said, this analysis reflects a sample that mostly identifies as White.

**H3: There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's mother or mother-figure makes about the subject's body and her body satisfaction.**

Among survey respondents, 82.4% (n=122) felt that their mother played an important role in their development. Only 19.6% (n=29) of respondents indicated having a mother-figure that was important in their development. Respondents indicated that their mother-figure was an aunt (n=8), grandmother (n=9), step-mother (n=7), cousin (n=1), coach (n=1), babysitter (n=1), and two did not describe the relationship. Due to the low response count for those who felt that their mother-figure was important, the feedback categories were collapsed to represent responses for those who felt that either their mother or mother-figure were important. There may be some overlap, respondents may have indicated having a mother and a mother-figure that were important, which explains why the N for feedback from one's mother or mother-figure is higher than the number of total survey respondents. Table 4 shows the distribution of feedback that the respondents could recall from their mother or mother-figure about their bodies. Among those respondents who indicated that their mother or mother-figure were important in their development, only 13.9% recalled negative feedback and 58.3% recalled positive feedback.

***Table 4: Descriptive Stats of Feedback from Mother or Mother-Figure***

*Descriptive Data*

Feedback from Mother or Mother-Figure (n=151)	n	(Valid %)
Extremely Negative	1	0.7%
Mostly Negative	20	13.2%
Mixed Messages	36	23.8%
Mostly Positive	39	25.8%
Extremely Positive	49	32.5%
No Comments	6	4.0%

A Pearson correlation test was run to determine the relationship between the feedback received from their mother or mother-figure and body satisfaction measures (See Table 5 and Table 6). There was a weak, significant positive correlation between the types of feedback the respondent can recall from their mother or mother-figure and the respondent's BSQ-16 results,  $r = .235$ ,  $p < .01$ , and BSS score,  $r = .262$ ,  $p < .004$ . When the type of comments the respondent recalls from their mother or mother-figure were perceived as being positive, body shape satisfaction is also likely to increase, thereby supporting Hypothesis 3.

**Table 5: Correlation of Feedback from Mother and BSQ-16 Results**  
*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Feedback from Mother or Mother-Figure	BSQ-16 Results
Feedback from Mother or Mother-Figure	Correlation	1	.235**
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.010
	N	126	120
BSQ-16 Results	Correlation	.235**	1
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.
	N	120	135

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 6: Correlation of Feedback from Mother or Mother-Figure and BSS Score**

*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Feedback from Mother or Mother-Figure	BSS Score
Feedback from Mother or Mother-Figure	Correlation	1	.262**
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.004
	N	140	122
BSS Score	Correlation	.262**	1
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.
	N	122	126

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**H4: There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's mother or mother-figure makes about her own body and the subject's body satisfaction.** Among respondents who indicated that their mother or mother-figure was significant in their development, respondents were asked to indicate how their mother or mother-figure commented on her own body. Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics for the way survey respondents could recall the way their mother or mother-figure talked about her own body. Among those who indicated having a mother or mother-figure that was significant in their development, 45.4% recalled that their mother or mother-figure made negative comments about her own body and only 20% recalled positive comments.

**Table 7: Descriptive Stats of Mother or Mother-Figure Comments About Self**

*Descriptive Data*

Mother or Mother-Figure		
Comments About Self (n=150)	n	(Valid %)
Extremely Negative	19	12.7%
Mostly Negative	49	32.7%
Mixed Messages	45	30.0%
Mostly Positive	19	12.7%
Extremely Positive	11	7.3%
No Comments	7	4.7%

A Pearson correlation test was run to determine if there was a relationship between the way respondents recalled the way their mother commented about her own body and the respondent's body satisfaction. No significant correlation was found, thus Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

**H5: There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's father or father-figure makes about the subject's body and her body satisfaction.**

Among survey respondents, 46.6% (n=69) felt that their father played an important role in their development. Only 7.4% (n=11) of respondents indicated having a father-figure that was important. Respondents indicated that their father-figure was a step-dad (n=4), mother's long-term boyfriend (n=1), grandfather (n=4), or a family friend (n=1). With such a low response count for those who indicated having an important father-figure, the feedback from father and father-figure were combined. There may be some overlap, it's possible that a respondent had both an important father and father-figure. Table 8 shows the distribution of feedback that the respondents could recall from their father or father-figure about their body. Among those respondents who indicated that their father or father-figure were important in their development, only 16.3% recalled negative feedback and 52.5% recalled positive feedback.

**Table 8: Descriptive Stats of Feedback from Father or Father-Figure**  
*Descriptive Data*

Feedback from Father or Father-Figure (n=80)	n	(Valid %)
Extremely Negative	2	2.5%
Mostly Negative	11	13.8%
Mixed Messages	19	23.8%
Mostly Positive	24	30.0%
Extremely Positive	18	22.5%
No Comments	6	7.5%

The appropriate correlation tests were run to test for a correlation between the feedback respondents could recall from their father or father-figure and body satisfaction measures (See Table 9 and Table 10). There was a moderate, significant positive relationship found with the BSS score,  $r = .448$ ,  $p < .001$ , and a weak positive relationship with BSQ-16 results,  $r = .255$ ,  $p < .043$ . When respondents perceived that their father or father-figure made positive comments about the respondent's body, they were also likely to have higher levels of body satisfaction. Hypothesis 5 is supported, feedback from one's father is significantly associated with body satisfaction.

**Table 9: Correlation of Feedback from Father and BSQ-16 Results**  
*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Feedback from Father or Father- Figure	BSQ-16 Results
Feedback from Father or Father-Figure	Correlation	1	.255*
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.043
	N	68	63
BSQ-16 Results	Correlation	.255*	1
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.043	.
	N	63	135

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 10: Correlation of Feedback from Father and BSS Score**  
*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Feedback from Father or Father- Figure	BSS Score
Feedback from Father or Father- Figure	Correlation	1	.448**
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	68	67
BSS Score	Correlation	.448**	1
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	67	140

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**H6: There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's father or father-figure makes about his own body and the subject's body satisfaction.** Those that indicated their father or father-figure was significant in their development were asked if they could recall any comments that their father or father-figure made about his own body. Table 11 shows the descriptive statistics for the way survey respondents could recall the way their father or father-figure talked about his own body. Among those respondents who indicated that their father or father-figure were important in their development, only 25.3% recalled that their father or father-figure made negative comments about his own body and 35.4% recalled positive comments.

**Table 11: Descriptive Stats of Father or Father-Figure Comments About Self**

*Descriptive Data*

Father or Father-Figure		
Comments About Self (n=79)	n	(Valid %)
Extremely Negative	3	3.8%
Mostly Negative	17	21.5%
Mixed Messages	21	26.6%
Mostly Positive	23	29.1%
Extremely Positive	5	6.3%
No Comments	10	12.7%

A Pearson's correlation test was run to determine if there was a relationship between the way respondents recalled the way their father or father-figure commented about his own body and the respondent's body satisfaction (See Table 12). No relationship was found with the BSS score, but there was a relationship with the BSQ-16 results,  $r = .276$ ,  $p < .036$ . Among these respondents who indicated that their father or father-figure was significant, when they perceived that their father or father-figure made more positive comments about his own body, they were also more likely to have less concern about their body shape.

**Table 12: Correlation of Father or Father-Figure Comments About Self and BSQ-16 Results**

*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Comments About Self	BSQ-16 Results
Father or Father-Figure Comments About Self	Correlation	1	.276*
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.036
	N	63	58
BSQ-16 Results	Correlation	.276*	1
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	.
	N	58	135

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**H7: There is a positive relationship between the positivity of messages one's parent makes about other women's bodies and the subject's own personal body satisfaction.** The following analysis reflects the responses from survey respondents who indicated that either their mother, mother-figure, father or father-figure had a significant role in their development. Table 13 shows the frequency statistics for the kinds of comments that their mother, mother-figure, father or father-figure made about other women's bodies. Among respondents who indicated that their father or father-figure was important to their development, only 8.8% recalled that their father or father-figure made negative comments about other women's bodies, and 36.3% recalled positive comments. Among respondents who indicated that their mother or mother-figure was important to their development, 15.3% recalled negative comments about other women's bodies, and 40.9% recalled positive comments. The most interesting finding presented in Table 13, is that 25% of respondents indicated that their father or father-figure did not make any comments about other women's bodies, but only 7.6% of respondents indicated that their mother or mother-figure did not make any comments about other women's bodies. Based



on the survey data, it appears that mothers and mother-figures were more likely to make comments about other women's bodies than fathers and father-figures.

**Table 13: Descriptive Stats of Comments About Other Women's Bodies**

*Descriptive Data*

Father or Father-Figure Comments About Other Women's Bodies (n=80)		
	n	(Valid %)
Extremely Negative	2	2.5%
Mostly Negative	5	6.3%
Mixed Messages	24	30.0%
Mostly Positive	23	28.8%
Extremely Positive	6	7.5%
No Comments	20	25.0%
Mother or Mother-Figure Comments About Other Women's Bodies (n=144)		
	n	(Valid %)
Extremely Negative	1	0.7%
Mostly Negative	21	14.6%
Mixed Messages	52	36.1%
Mostly Positive	48	33.3%
Extremely Positive	11	7.6%
No Comments	11	7.6%

The way respondents had indicated that their mother or mother-figure spoke of other women's bodies showed no relationship with the respondent's body satisfaction measures. However, the way respondents indicated that their father or father-figure spoke of other women's bodies was significantly associated with respondent's BSS score,  $r = .270$ ,  $p < .049$ . The Pearson correlation in Table 14 shows a weak, positive relationship indicating that as respondents perceived that their father made more positive comments about other women's bodies they were also more likely to show higher levels of body

satisfaction, showing some support for Hypothesis 7. There was no significant relationship with social class measures.

**Table 14: Correlation of Father or Father-Figure Comments About Other Women and BSS Score**

*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Comments About Other Women	BSS Score
Father or Father-Figure Comments About Other Women	Correlation	1	.270*
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.049
	N	55	54
BSS Score	Correlation	.270*	1
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	.
	N	54	140

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**H8: Comments made by the mother or mother-figure will prove to be the most significant of family interactions that influence the subject's body satisfaction.**

Before starting the section of the questionnaire about feedback and body discourse, survey respondents were asked who they felt primarily influenced their perception of their body. Only 11 women said that her father or father-figure was the primary influence and 22 women said that their sibling had a significant influence, but 104 women indicated that her mother or mother-figure was the primary influence on how she felt about her body. Hypothesis 8 is supported, most survey respondents perceived that their mother or mother-figure was the primary influence on their body satisfaction. That being said, we can't ignore the relative importance of fathers and father-figures in how they talk about the subject's body, their own bodies, and other women's bodies. The way fathers and father-figures engage in body discourse is significantly associated with body

satisfaction, even when no association is found among body discourse with mothers and mother-figures.

**H9: There is a positive relationship between the positivity of comments about the subject's body made by a sibling and the subject's body satisfaction.** Sixty-one respondents felt that their sibling was significant in their development. Among these respondents, 27 respondents indicated having an important sister, 16 respondents indicated having an important brother, and 18 did not indicate the sibling relationship. Table 15 shows the distribution of feedback that these respondents could recall from their sibling about their bodies. Among survey respondents who indicated having a sibling who played an important role in their development, 21.3% recalled negative feedback and 41% recalled positive feedback.

**Table 15: Descriptive Stats of Feedback from Sibling**  
*Descriptive Data*

Feedback from Sibling (n=61)	n	(Valid %)
Extremely Negative	2	3.3%
Mostly Negative	11	18.0%
Mixed Messages	18	29.5%
Mostly Positive	16	26.2%
Extremely Positive	9	14.8%
No Comments	5	8.2%

A Pearson correlation test was run to determine the relationship between the feedback received from a sibling about their body and their demonstrated body satisfaction (See Table 16 and Table 17). There was a weak, significant positive correlation between the types of feedback the respondent can recall from their sibling about their body and the respondent's BSQ-16 results,  $r = .346$ ,  $p < .01$ , and a moderate, significant positive correlation with BSS score,  $r = .486$ ,  $p < .001$ . As the type of

comments the respondent recalls from their sibling were perceived as being mostly positive, body shape satisfaction is also likely to increase, demonstrating support for Hypothesis 9.

**Table 16: Correlation of Feedback from Sibling and BSQ-16**  
*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Feedback from Sibling	BSQ-16 Results
Feedback from Sibling	Correlation Coefficient	1	.346*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.010
	N	56	54
	<hr/>		
BSQ-16 Results	Correlation Coefficient	.346*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.
	N	54	135

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 17: Correlation of Comments from Sibling and BSS Score**  
*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Feedback from Sibling	BSS Score
Feedback from Sibling	Correlation Coefficient	1	.486**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	56	55
	<hr/>		
BSS Score	Correlation Coefficient	.486**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	55	140

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**H10: There is a negative relationship between dieting and body satisfaction.**

Among survey respondents, 68.3% (95 women) indicated that they have been on a diet at some time to lose weight. Of those who have been on a diet to lose weight, the age of their first diet ranged from age 10 to age 22 with an average age of 15.7. Table 18 shows

the frequency statistics of those respondents who have dieted to lose weight and their indication of whether they were encouraged to diet to lose weight by their mother, mother-figure, father, father-figure, sibling, friends, significant other, coach, physician, or if it wasn't encouraged by anyone. It is important to note that 49% of those who have been on a diet to lose weight believed it was a decision made on their own, that it was not encouraged by anyone, and that 31% indicated that their mother or mother-figure had encouraged them to diet to lose weight. Mothers, mother-figures, and friends are shown to be important in influencing dieting behaviors.

***Table 18: Descriptive Stats of Who Encouraged Diet to Lose Weight***  
*Descriptive Data*

Encouraged to Diet to Lose	
Weight (Choose all that apply)	n
Mother or Mother-Figure	31
Father or Father-Figure	14
Sibling	9
Friends	25
Significant Other	7
Coach	13
Physician	8
No one encouraged it	49

Survey respondents who demonstrate no concern for shape are not protected from dieting practices. Some respondents who demonstrated being very satisfied with their body shape reported that they have been on a diet to lose weight. Table 19 shows the crosstabulation of BSQ-16 results and the variable for whether or not the respondent has been on a diet to lose weight.

**Table 19: BSQ-16 Results and Dieting to Lose Weight Crosstabulation**  
*BSQ-16 Results and Dieting to Lose Weight*

BSQ-16 Results	Diet to Lose Weight		Total
	No	Yes	
Marked concern with shape	1 4.5%	21 95.5%	22 100.0%
Moderate concern with shape	7 17.1%	34 82.9%	41 100.0%
Mild concern with shape	14 33.3%	28 66.7%	42 100.0%
No concern with shape	19 67.9%	9 32.1%	28 100.0%
Total	41 30.8%	92 69.2%	<b>133</b> <b>100.0%</b>

An independent samples t-test to compare the means of those who indicate that they have been on a diet to lose weight and BSS scores shows the Sig. (2-tailed) value is .004. Thus, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean body satisfaction of those who indicate that they have been on a diet to lose weight, and those who indicate they have not. The mean BSS score was lower among those who have been on a diet to lose weight. This demonstrates support for Hypothesis 10, those who have dieted to lose weight are more likely to also report lower levels of body satisfaction. Dieting behavior does not show any relationship to social class.

**H11: There is a negative relationship between serious consideration of cosmetic alterations to the body and body satisfaction.** Only seven women indicated that they have made cosmetic alterations to their body and 49 women said they have never considered making any cosmetic alterations. The women who have had cosmetic

alterations come from various social class backgrounds. Table 20 shows the descriptive statistics for those who have considered having cosmetic alterations and those who have had cosmetic alterations.

***Table 20: Descriptive Stats of Cosmetic Alterations Data***

<i>Descriptive Data</i>	
Cosmetic Alterations (CA)	n
Have made CA	7
Always consider CA	4
Often consider CA	7
Sometimes consider CA	34
Rarely consider CA	35
Never consider CA	49
Types of CA Considered	n
Breast Augmentation	43
Breast Reduction	6
Liposuction	24
Tummy Tuck	19
Rhinoplasty	17
Buttock Augmentation	12
Laser Hair Removal	47
Types of CA Completed	n
Breast Augmentation	1
Liposuction	1
Tummy Tuck	1
Rhinoplasty	2
Gastric Sleeve	1
Ears Pinned	1

Surprisingly few respondents have made cosmetic alterations to their bodies (n=7), and only 7.4% indicated that they always or often consider making cosmetic alterations to their bodies. Among respondents who indicated that they had considered making cosmetic alterations to their body, the most popular alterations considered were

laser hair removal and breast augmentation. The majority of survey respondents indicated that they never considered making any cosmetic alterations to their body.

A Spearman's correlation was run to determine the relationship between the variable for considering cosmetic alterations and respondent's body satisfaction measures (See Table 21 and Table 22). There was a weak but significant correlation between the consideration of cosmetic alterations and BSQ-16 results,  $r = .205$ ,  $p < .022$ , and BSS score,  $r = .292$ ,  $p < .001$ . As the respondent considers cosmetic alterations more often, body shape satisfaction is also likely to decrease, demonstrating support for Hypothesis 11. As consideration of cosmetic alterations becomes more frequent, body satisfaction also likely decreases.

**Table 21: Correlation of Consideration of Cosmetic Alterations and BSQ-16 Results**

*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Cosmetic Alterations	BSQ-16 Results
Consideration of Cosmetic Alterations	Correlation Coefficient	1	-.205*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.022
	N	129	124
BSQ-16 Results	Correlation Coefficient	-.205*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.022	.
	N	124	135

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



**Table 22: Correlation of Consideration of Cosmetic Alterations and BSS Score**  
*Pearson Correlation Two-Tailed Test*

		Cosmetic Alterations	BSS Score
Consideration of Cosmetic Alterations	Correlation Coefficient	1	-.292**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
	N	129	125
	<hr/>		
BSS Score	Correlation Coefficient	-.292**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
	N	125	140
	<hr/>		

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Ideal Body.** Survey respondents were asked to pick a descriptive word to describe the ideal female body. Table 23 shows the frequency statistics of how respondents chose an ideal body.

**Table 23: Descriptive Stats of Ideal Body**  
*Descriptive Data*

Ideal Body (n=139)	n	(%)
Athletic	50	33.8%
Curvy	42	28.4%
Skinny	18	12.2%
Strong	15	10.1%
Other	14	9.5%
<hr/>		
Other Ideal Body (n=14)	n	
Healthy	5	
All of the above	2	
Whatever she wants	1	
Athletic & Skinny	1	
Strong, but Curvy	1	
Curvy & Skinny	1	
Curvy, but Healthy	1	
Curvy, but Toned with a Flat Tummy	1	
Proportional, Slim but Feminine	1	

Each item was recoded into its own variable (Athletic – 1, Other – 0; Curvy – 1, Other – 0; Skinny – 1, Other – 0), and for the purpose of analysis Athletic and Strong were collapsed in one category. An independent samples t-test to compare the means of those who identify the athletic, strong body type as ideal and BSS scores shows the Sig. (2-tailed) value is .014. Thus, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean body satisfaction of those who indicate that the ideal is athletic or strong, and those who indicate some other ideal. The mean BSS score was higher among those who view the athletic, strong body type as ideal. We can conclude that respondents who indicated the ideal body as strong and athletic were likely to have higher levels of body satisfaction. Another independent samples t-test to compare the means of those who identify the skinny body as ideal and BSS scores shows the Sig. (2-tailed) value is .027. Thus, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean body satisfaction of those who indicate that the ideal is skinny, and those who indicate some other ideal. The mean BSS score was lower among those who view the skinny body as ideal. We can conclude that respondents who indicated the ideal body as skinny were likely to have lower levels of body satisfaction.

**Post-hoc Analysis.** There were some findings and relationships that were not predicted in the hypotheses. These unexpected findings may be due to random sampling error rather than an actual phenomenon in the world, but nonetheless are worth mentioning. Among survey respondents who indicated that there was an important “Other” in their development, five indicated having an important friend and four indicated having a significant partner that was important in their development. This research was primarily interested in the impact of family, but it is interesting that some

respondents felt their friends and significant partners were important to their development. Future research could assess the impact of feedback from family members compared to the impact of feedback from significant partners and friends.

Eighty survey respondents indicated that they were not a student-athlete in high school or college, and 58 respondents indicated that they were. An independent samples t-test was run to test if there was a relationship between social class and identifying as a student-athlete, but no significant relationship was found which means that women from various social class backgrounds were likely to have identified as a student-athlete, it was not just a luxury of the middle and upper class. Respondents were also asked to indicate if, for the most of their childhood, they were raised in a two-parent household and only 35 respondents indicated that they were not, and 103 respondents indicated that they were. Being raised in a two-parent household was related to income, those from households with a higher annual household income were more likely to come from a two-parent household. This is not surprising, a dual-earner household will have a higher income level. The reason this question was included in the survey instrument, was to test how the presence of two parents might impact body satisfaction. There was no relationship between two-parent households and body satisfaction.

It is interesting to note that survey respondents were likely to recall positive feedback from their mothers, mother-figures, fathers, and father-figures. However, the data show that respondents were much more likely to recall that their mother or mother-figure spoke negatively of her own body (45.4%), and to recall that their father or father-figure spoke positively of his own body (35.4%). Yet, the way respondents could recall that their mother spoke of her own body was not associated with the subject's body

satisfaction. Perhaps this suggests that negative body discourse has become normalized among women, and lost its impact.

Since many survey respondents indicated that they received “Mixed Messages that include Positive and Negative Comments,” I created a dummy variable for feedback from mothers or fathers that included only this category. It is hard to know if respondents relied on this category in order to not condemn their parent, or whether they received more positive than negative or more negative than positive. It is an imperfect category. Future studies should make their respondents choose which kind of feedback they received the most to make them choose either positive or negative. With that said, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the means of those who indicate that they received mixed messages from their mother or father and their BSS scores. There was no significant difference of means for mixed messages from their father and BSS scores. However, the difference of means for mixed messages from their mother and BSS scores shows significance (2-tailed) value is .014. Thus, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean body satisfaction of those who indicate that they have received mixed messages from their mother, and those who indicated either exclusively positive or negative feedback categories. The mean BSS score was lower among those who indicated that their mother provided mixed feedback. Since hypothesis 3 was supported, positive feedback from the respondents’ mothers was associated with higher levels of body satisfaction, we can assume that mixed messages may reflect more negative messages than positive for resulting in lower levels of body satisfaction. Mixed messages may not truly represent a neutral category. The same method was used to test

whether or not “No comments” was associated with body satisfaction, but no association was found.

## Qualitative Analysis

**Data Collection & Analysis.** The purpose of the qualitative research was to supplement the quantitative data with in-depth understanding of the body discourse that takes place in the family. Since this research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods, the results presented in the qualitative section are at times presented in a quantitative way in order to present the two methods as cohesive. The semi-structured interview questions were used to illustrate “positive” and “negative” feedback to provide a better understanding of how do we develop meaning in our bodies through body discourse in the family, and to find patterns of how the body is constructed and influenced by race and class identities. The findings from the semi-structured interviews revealed new themes that were not considered during the construction of the survey instrument. The qualitative analysis is no longer just supplementing the quantitative data, it is providing new insights to the way women come to understand their bodies in 2015. The discussion section will demonstrate how the quantitative and the qualitative findings, when taken together answer the research question for this study.

All interviews were transcribed and coded by inductive analysis. Feedback, Body Talk, Social Class, Race and Dieting Practices were *a priori* codes developed out of the semi-structured interview questions. The category “Dieting Practices” evolved into Body Discipline to incorporate diet, exercise, and self-control. Body Discipline reflects the ways women described engaging their bodies in ways that reflect self-control and self-restraint, through dressing modestly, exercising regularly, or eating appropriately. The Body Discipline theme allows for a range of practices from those that focus on thinness, to fitness, and to health. The first round of coding included applying the *a priori* codes

and developing a list of open codes. Balance, Genetics, Food in Home, and a variety of categories within Body Talk emerged. Body Talk was originally conceptualized to capture the way women talk about their body and body size, but in the interview process it became clear that a trend toward being “fit” and “healthy” was as relevant as size. New codes were created to capture the emerging, unexpected themes in the data. The following analysis will address the major themes of the interviews while simultaneously looking for significant experiences that differ by race and social class.

**Participant Profiles.** In-depth semi-structured interviews (Appendix IV: Semi-Structured Interview Questions) were conducted with 15 students at the University of Nevada, Reno. Each interview participant was asked about their family background, conversations about the body, and dieting practices. First, participants were asked to categorize themselves as having grown up in a Lower class, Working class, Lower-Middle class, Upper-Middle class, or Upper class household and indicate their childhood household annual income (i.e. Less than \$20,000, \$20,000-\$39,999, \$40,000-\$69,999, \$70,000-\$124,999, \$125,000-\$200,000, More than \$200,000). Four participants identified as being raised in a working class household, seven participants identified as being raised in a lower-middle class household, and four identified as being raised in an upper-middle class household. No one identified as lower class or upper class.

Of the women who identified as coming from a working class household, one woman indicated her childhood household annual income was less than \$20,000, one woman indicated her childhood household annual income as being \$20,000-\$39,999, and two women indicated that their childhood household annual income was between \$40,000 and \$69,999. Of those participants who identified as being from a lower-middle

class household, five women indicated coming from a household with an annual income ranging from \$40,000-\$69,999, and two women indicated a childhood household annual income between \$70,000 and \$124,999. One woman who identified herself as coming from an upper-middle class family indicated an annual household income of \$70,000-\$124,999, one woman indicated an annual household income from \$125,000 to \$200,000, and two upper-class women indicated that their childhood household annual income was greater than \$200,000. Four women identified as Black, four women identified as Latina, and seven women identified as White. Table 24 and Table 25 illustrate the demographics of the interview participants.

**Table 24: Race and Social Class of Interview Participants Crosstab**  
*Race and Social Class*

Race Category	Social Class			Total
	Working Class	Lower-Middle	Upper-Middle	
Black	1	2	1	4
Latina	1	3	0	4
White	2	2	3	7
Total	4	7	4	15

**Table 25: Race and Household Income of Interview Participants Crosstab**  
*Race and Annual Household Income*

Racial Category	Income						Total
	Less than \$20,000	\$20,000 - \$39,999	\$40,000 - \$69,999	\$70,000 - \$124,999	\$125,000 - \$200,000	More than \$200,000	
Black	1	0	2	1	0	0	4
Latina	0	0	2	2	0	0	4
White	0	1	3	0	1	2	7
Total	1	1	7	3	1	2	15

None of these women expected to be in a lower socioeconomic class than their parents. Six women thought they would end up in the same social class as their parents. Three out of the four upper-middle class women believed they would remain in the same



social class as their parents. Five out of the seven lower-middle class women believed they would be in a higher social class than their parents. Three out of the four women from the working class believed they would be in a higher social class than their parents. Considering these women were all attending the University of Nevada, Reno, their perception of being socially mobile is not surprising.

**Table 26: Interview Participant Profiles***Participant Profiles, Organized by Race then by Social Class*

<u>Demographics</u>				<u>Body Satisfaction Measures</u>	
Pseudonym	Race Category	Social Class	Income	BSQ-16 Results	BSS Score
Ketema	Black	Working Class	Less than \$20,000	Marked concern with shape	34
Ameera	Black	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	No concern with shape	54
Jojo	Black	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Moderate concern with shape	34
Alysha	Black	Upper-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	Moderate concern with shape	44
Marie	Latina	Working Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Marked concern with shape	34
Elizabeth	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	No concern with shape	53
Alex	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Mild concern with shape	35
Cristyna	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	Marked concern with shape	29
Michelle	White	Working Class	\$20,000-\$39,999	Mild concern with shape	34
Nicole	White	Working Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Moderate concern with shape	40
Stephanie	White	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Mild concern with shape	34
Christina	White	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	-	41
Kara	White	Upper-Middle Class	More than \$200,000	No concern with shape	39
Louise	White	Upper-Middle Class	\$125,000-\$200,000	Mild concern with shape	42
Emma	White	Upper-Middle Class	More than \$200,000	-	-

\*Categories marked with a "-" represent cases when the participant did not answer all questions within the scale, thus an accurate assessment of their BSQ-16 or BSS could not be calculated.

Table 26 shows each interview participant profile arranged by race category and then by social class. On the right side of the table is each participant's Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-16) results, Body Size Satisfaction score, and Body Size Satisfaction results. Table 27 shows The Participant Profiles, Body Satisfaction by BSQ-16. The data do not reveal any significant relationship between race, social class, and body shape satisfaction among interview participants. The BSQ-16 Results show that Ameera (Black, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K), Elizabeth (Latina, Lower-Middle class, \$70-124K), and Kara (White, Upper-Middle class, More than \$200K) had no concern with shape. Only three women demonstrated "Marked concern with shape," two identified as Latina and one identified as Black. Louise, a White woman from the upper-middle class and

Michelle, a White woman from the working class, had indicated in their interviews that they have in the past struggled with an eating disorder. Their responses in the survey show that today they are somewhat satisfied with their body size and only mildly concerned with body shape, showing no significant difference from other interview participants.

**Table 27: Participant Profiles, Body Satisfaction organized by BSQ-16 Results**

*Participant Profiles, Body Satisfaction by BSQ-16*

<u>Demographics</u>				<u>Body Satisfaction Measures</u>	
Pseudonym	Race Category	Social Class	Income	BSQ-16 Results	BSS Score
Ameera	Black	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	No concern with shape	54
Elizabeth	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	No concern with shape	53
Kara	White	Upper-Middle Class	More than \$200,000	No concern with shape	39
Michelle	White	Working Class	\$20,000-\$39,999	Mild concern with shape	34
Alex	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Mild concern with shape	35
Stephanie	White	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Mild concern with shape	34
Louise	White	Upper-Middle Class	\$125,000-\$200,000	Mild concern with shape	42
Nicole	White	Working Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Moderate concern with shape	40
Jojo	Black	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Moderate concern with shape	34
Alysha	Black	Upper-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	Moderate concern with shape	44
Ketema	Black	Working Class	Less than \$20,000	Marked concern with shape	34
Marie	Latina	Working Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Marked concern with shape	34
Cristyna	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	Marked concern with shape	29
Christina	White	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	-	41
Emma	White	Upper-Middle Class	More than \$200,000	-	-

\*Categories marked with a "-" represent cases when the participant did not answer all questions within the scale, thus an accurate assessment of their BSQ-16 or BSS could not be calculated.

The Body Satisfaction Survey (BSS) questionnaire was developed to measure level of satisfaction with specific body parts (Martinez, 2013). The BSS Score reflects the sum of participants' rating of satisfaction with each body part (Very Dissatisfied – 1, Somewhat Dissatisfied – 2, Somewhat Satisfied – 3, Very Satisfied – 4), making the highest possible score for all 14 body parts a score of 56. Interview participants show a

BSS Score range from 29 to 54, and an average BSS Score of 39. Ameera (Black, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K), Alysha (Black, Upper-Middle class, \$70-124K), and Elizabeth (Latina, Lower-Middle class, \$70-124K) were the only interview participants who indicated being very satisfied with their bodies in the BSS. Cristyna, a Latina woman from the lower-middle class had the lowest score on the BSS. Table 28 shows the Participant Profiles, Body Satisfaction by BSS Scores and reveals that there may be some relationship between social class and BSS Scores. Three out of the four participants from a working class household indicated having the second lowest BSS Score, and all participants from an upper-middle class household indicated a BSS Score above the interview participant average BSS Score.

**Table 28: Participant Profiles, Body Satisfaction Organized by BSS Scores**

*Participant Profiles, Body Satisfaction by BSS Scores*

<u>Demographics</u>				<u>Body Satisfaction Measures</u>		
Pseudonym	Race Category	Social Class	Income	BSQ-16 Results	BSS Score	BSS Results
Cristyna	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	Marked concern with shape	29	Somewhat Satisfied
Michelle	White	Working Class	\$20,000-\$39,999	Mild concern with shape	34	Somewhat Satisfied
Ketema	Black	Working Class	Less than \$20,000	Marked concern with shape	34	Somewhat Satisfied
Marie	Latina	Working Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Marked concern with shape	34	Somewhat Satisfied
Stephanie	White	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Mild concern with shape	34	Somewhat Satisfied
Jojo	Black	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Moderate concern with shape	34	Somewhat Satisfied
Alex	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Mild concern with shape	35	Somewhat Satisfied
Kara	White	Upper-Middle Class	More than \$200,000	No concern with shape	39	Somewhat Satisfied
Nicole	White	Working Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Moderate concern with shape	40	Somewhat Satisfied
Christina	White	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	-	41	Somewhat Satisfied
Louise	White	Upper-Middle Class	\$125,000-\$200,000	Mild concern with shape	42	Somewhat Satisfied
Alysha	Black	Upper-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	Moderate concern with shape	44	Very Satisfied
Elizabeth	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	No concern with shape	53	Very Satisfied
Ameera	Black	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	No concern with shape	54	Very Satisfied
Emma	White	Upper-Middle Class	More than \$200,000	-	-	-

\*Categories marked with a "-" represent cases when the participant did not answer all questions within the scale, thus an accurate assessment of their BSQ-16 or BSS could not be calculated.

**Social Class.** Each participant was asked to describe what it was like growing up in their household based on their race, social class, and annual household income. The

purpose of the following qualitative results is to illustrate how social class shapes daily interactions in the family, demonstrating support for the “cultural tastes” described by Bourdieu (1984), and the “leisure class” activities described by Veblen (2007). Their responses reflect the variation in the day-to-day experiences of women based on their social class background. This is important because it may reflect the capacity for women from different social class backgrounds to engage in body disciplinary practices. In addition, not all participants come from a two-parent household. Women who remember their parent’s divorce seem to be very aware of the financial transition, or the cost of divorce. At this point in the interview, qualitative indicators of race were not clearly defined.

Working class women, regardless of race, talked about the “struggles” and “strain” their families faced, “living paycheck to paycheck,” it wasn’t a family secret. Sometimes this meant giving up daily necessities, as explained by Nicole:

Sometimes there was financial problems, we struggled a lot. It has gotten better. But me going to school has been kind of a strain... My whole life, even at an age where you are typically not aware of your financial situation, I always was. My dad talked to me about it, or he would get stressed and I could sense that had to do with it. (Nicole, White, Working class, \$40-69K)

Lower-middle class women were not untouched by financial struggle. However, the financial struggle was to give up “extra” luxuries while the necessities, such as food, were secured. Women from the lower-middle class also had the ability to participate in extra-curricular activities as explained by Christina, a White woman from the Lower-Middle class, “I got to play the sports I wanted. Budgeting was definitely something that was always first, but my parents made sure I could participate and do the thing that I was

passionate about or interested in. So I got to play all the sports I wanted.” Financial stability and family budgets appear to be discussed openly in the family.

Well basically growing up both of my parents worked, so I didn't feel like I needed something. If I wanted something I didn't get it, but my parents would give me everything I need. Yes they would spoil me but not too much to feel like we were rich. But I guess we were financially stable and they did everything they could to give me everything. To this point I don't feel like I need something or like I was left with a desire to have something. (Elizabeth, Latina, Lower-Middle, \$70-124K)

Upper-middle class women recognize their luxuries, and are incredibly thankful for their lifestyle. These women seem to have a great awareness of how to earn these luxuries, that nothing comes free. The activities of the “leisure class” are part of everyday life. Necessities are secure, financial struggle is less impactful, and commencement in leisure activities become commonplace. These two women from upper-middle class households describe their social class standing as providing a stable environment to engage in extra-curricular, leisure activities:

It wasn't typical, I have friends that have less money than me and they explain their situation of not having enough food, their parents working or not coming home at night. I never had that problem, my mom was always home when I got home and she took care of me. I have had more opportunities than others. We've gone on vacations and cruises and stuff like that. I talk to my friends about whether or not they've been on a cruise and they are like “Uh...a cruise...no, isn't that for rich people.” So I had the opportunity to travel and be well supported. My mom is paying fully for my college and I don't have to worry about loans. All my other friends are like worrying about paying off their student loans and all this other stuff. (Alysha, Black, Upper-Middle class, \$70-124K)

It was awesome, I've had a great life. I went to public schools my whole life though. I was involved, I cheered, I played competitive soccer, I did horseback riding, I played softball, I was involved in school and always got good grades. I started working at 16 for work experience, and now I am working in college, again just for experience... My dad works full time, my mom works part time and is just a graphic designer for fun. My mom always picked us up after school. She worked from home until we got into middle school, but she still was always home to pick us up from school. My dad would go on business trips but only for a

couple days at a time. He would get home at 5 or 6 weekdays, and sometimes had to work weekends. (Emma, White, Upper-Middle class, More than \$200K)

Alysha and Emma both demonstrate an understanding of their privileged lifestyle, and acknowledge the importance of these experiences in their childhood. Their recognition of the benefits of being in a higher social class reveals that women from higher social class backgrounds, with greater economic security, are afforded the opportunity to engage in activities outside of work and school.

**Balance.** The theme for Balance represents the difficulty many interview participants had expressed in balancing work, school, and body disciplinary practices. While this was not specifically part of the semi-structured interview questions, it seemed to be relevant to the discussion of diet and exercise practices and appeared in interviews from women in various social class positions. Marie, a Latina from a working class family with an annual household income between \$40,000 and \$69,999, explains the problematic relationship between body disciplinary practices and day-to-day constraints:

Looking at all these celebrities and models that are so skinny and, I just wish I could look like that...and then I realize they don't do anything all day, they have time to go to the gym. They don't have all the worries in the world, like I need to go to college, I have to go. I don't want to disappoint my family and I don't want to disappoint myself. I put so much time into my education and stuff that I feel like I forget I am eating bad, or I forget to go to the gym, and there is a lot of stress. I'm a stress eater. College is so expensive...so stressful...This semester is a little easier so I can actually take the time to go to the gym or go to the library whenever I want, and I can eat healthy. (Marie, Latina, Working class, \$40-69K)

It was expected that this difficulty in balancing work, school, and a social life would manifest in the lives of women from lower social class backgrounds, where working while going to school isn't an option, but a necessity. Yet, women from all social class backgrounds had expressed similar concerns over balancing time, even if it was just

between coursework and body disciplinary practices. Not only is it difficult to squeeze in time for the gym, but there is difficulty in planning a healthy and balanced diet. Body discipline requires time for planning and implementation.

**Feedback.** Interview participants were asked to recall any messages about their body from their mother, mother-figure, father, father-figure, and siblings. Sometimes the initial response was “nothing negative,” and so this section will begin by reviewing the types of positive feedback these participants can recall. Positive feedback includes comments about being called pretty, beautiful, gorgeous, and it includes how parents are conveying a message about having a positive self-image. Even though the question was posed in a way to incite a response about negative and positive feedback, many participants assumed that the question was referring to negative feedback and often needed prompting for positive feedback. Positive feedback is not showing any trends based on raced and classed identities. Many participants had described positive feedback as being told they were “pretty” or “beautiful,” particularly when they were dressed up. Cristyna, a Latina from a lower-middle class family with an annual household income between \$70,000 and \$124,999, explained how significant her father-figure was in telling her that she was “pretty” every day, that he never said anything negative:

He was always very positive, again with the pretty thing. He was more like my dad. I would get ready in the bathroom to do my hair and makeup, and every morning he would knock and give me a cup of coffee, and he would say “Oh mija, you don’t need all that, you are pretty without it.”

Another important aspect of positive feedback, was the reliance upon body acceptance discourse between parent and child. Alysha, a Black woman from an upper-middle class



family with an annual household income of \$70,000 to \$124,999, explained that her mother, while making comments about her size, maintain a body acceptance dialogue:

I feel like my mom always told me to be comfortable in your own skin. I used to be thinner when I was younger, but then when my mom went away to Korea and I was being taken care of by family that's when I started gaining weight, and when she came back she was like "Woah! You've gained a lot of weight, but as long as you are happy and healthy then it's ok." And I thought I was happy and fine.

Even though, Alysha recalls her mother commenting on her weight, it is overpowered by the positivity associated with the body acceptance discourse.

Some of the feedback from parents appeared to be negative but was actually interpreted as being constructive criticism or stated with good intentions. Not all negative feedback was perceived in a positive light, but constructive criticism was trending among feedback from mothers. Ketema explains how her mother would make negative comments about her appearance, and yet, for Ketema, this was positive feedback.

From my mom, it was more of constructive-criticism, it didn't knock you down, so I would say it was positive. "Oh you are gaining weight, just watch what you are eating." It didn't make me feel bad, it was just something to learn from. In high school she would comment on my physical activity because I wasn't in sports. She would tell me to start eating healthier, but it wasn't meant to destroy me... So even though the comments are negative it helps reaffirm the healthy habits I need to stick with. (Ketema, Black, Working class, Less than \$20K)

Ketema interprets her mother's feedback as more of an enlightening suggestion meant to encourage her to live a healthier lifestyle. This theme of constructive criticism came up for many women in the interview process. Comments that might appear to be negative, or representative of fat-shaming, are interpreted as being harmless and even helpful.

**Body Talk.** The feedback presented above shows the emergence of themes included in Body Talk. Body Talk includes any remarks, comments, feedback, or thoughts about the body. Body Talk reflects the on-going conversation about the body.

Initially, I thought it was as simple as body talk, it would be either present or not present, either negative or positive. Instead, through open coding analysis it became clear that there are three designated types of body talk: size talk, health talk, and fit talk. Size talk is when the body is talked about in terms of body shape including terms such as weight, fat, skinny, big, small, or any related appearance standard. During the first round of coding, size talk was referred to as fat talk, assuming that fat played a determining role in body talk. However, as soon as the code for “stick thin” emerged consistently, it became clear that there are concerns about becoming too big, as well as becoming too small. Size talk allows for the fluctuation between big and small, thin and wide. Health talk is when the body is talked about in terms of health status, oftentimes this theme was used when participants referred to the health benefits of exercise and a balanced diet. Fit talk was the most unexpected variable, but it appeared over and over again whether it was the use of the word “fit” or “toned” there seems to be a trend toward fitness. Oftentimes, in one sentence, more than one form of body talk was employed. The abundance of health talk and fit talk, and the variation of size talk, demonstrates that the thin-ideal may be shifting out of view.

Table 29, titled “Interview Participant Profiles Including Body Talk,” has a count for types of Body Talk among each interview participant transcript. While this table doesn’t necessarily show when the different types of Body Talk are used in the same sentence, it does show that Fit Talk and Health Talk are more common than “Fat” Talk.

**Table 29: Interview Participant Profiles Including Body Talk: Organized by Social Class**

<i>Participant Profiles Including Body Talk: Organized by Social Class</i>				<i>Body Satisfaction Measures</i>				<i>Types of Body Talk</i>							
<i>Demographics</i>		<i>Race</i>		<i>BSQ-16 Results</i>		<i>BSS</i>		<i>"Fat"</i>		<i>Size</i>		<i>Health</i>		<i>Fit</i>	
<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Social Class</i>	<i>Income</i>	<i>Mild concern with shape</i>	<i>Moderate concern with shape</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>"Fat"</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Health</i>	<i>Fit</i>					
Michelle	White	Working Class	\$20,000-\$39,999	Mild concern with shape	Moderate concern with shape	34	5	4	2	2					
Nicole	White	Working Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Moderate concern with shape	Moderate concern with shape	40	1	4	2	0					
Marie	Latina	Working Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Marked concern with shape	Marked concern with shape	34	5	4	6	0					
Ketema	Black	Working Class	Less than \$20,000	Marked concern with shape	Marked concern with shape	34	0	4	7	0					
Stephanie	White	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Mild concern with shape	Mild concern with shape	34	0	6	0	2					
Christina	White	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	-	Mild concern with shape	41	0	2	2	2					
Alex	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Mild concern with shape	Mild concern with shape	35	1	4	2	2					
Ameera	Black	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	No concern with shape	No concern with shape	54	1	3	3	2					
Jojo	Black	Lower-Middle Class	\$40,000-\$69,999	Moderate concern with shape	Moderate concern with shape	34	4	13	9	2					
Cristyna	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	Marked concern with shape	Marked concern with shape	29	1	3	0	1					
Elizabeth	Latina	Lower-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	No concern with shape	No concern with shape	53	2	4	7	7					
Louise	White	Upper-Middle Class	\$125,000-\$200,000	Mild concern with shape	Mild concern with shape	42	2	10	2	0					
Aksha	Black	Upper-Middle Class	\$70,000-\$124,999	Moderate concern with shape	Moderate concern with shape	44	0	6	5	6					
Emma	White	Upper-Middle Class	More than \$200,000	-	Moderate concern with shape	-	2	6	7	2					
Kara	White	Upper-Middle Class	More than \$200,000	No concern with shape	No concern with shape	39	2	4	4	3					

\*Categories marked with a "-" represent cases when the participant did not answer all questions within the scale, thus an accurate assessment of their BSQ-16 or BSS could not be calculated.

***Fat Talk.*** One of the most interesting findings was that fat is out, and fit is in. In fact, throughout the interviews it seemed like people were avoiding using the word fat, as if it is the new F-word. Participants would talk about being “bigger” or wanting to lose weight, but fat was used less often than any other category of Body Talk. There is no clear connection of Fat Talk with body satisfaction measures, social class, or race category.

I don't know, I think I've always struggled with weight, because when I was little and in dance, I always noticed that I was bigger than everyone else. I would be in ballet, and I would say “Mom, why am I fatter than everyone? Everyone else is small, and I am fat!” and she would say “You are not fat, you look fine, you are beautiful, I don't know why you think you are fat.” Everyone was smaller than me though, even when we were the same height, before I stopped growing, but in my mind I could always see the difference between me and other people, in my mind I was always bigger and significantly bigger. (Jojo, Black, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)

Jojo demonstrates how terminology for size and fat go hand-in-hand (i.e. fat and skinny, big and small). While Fat Talk was not common, even avoided, during interviews, it has not disappeared from body discourse and still represents something bad.

***Size Talk.*** Women from all social class and racial backgrounds express some reference to size during the interview, from fat to skinny, big to small, thick to thin, thunder thighs to thigh gaps. Here we see more body talk that also coincides with comments about clothing size and proper fit. Size Talk does not appear to increase among any particular social class or race category, and does not seem to influence body satisfaction measures. Size Talk incorporates some elements of Fat Talk, but it is important to see how size talk reflects two extremes, being too fat and too skinny, too big and too small. For example, Marie explains how her parents spoke of other women's bodies as too thin:

Yeah, they always notice when people are really thin. Like my dad would say, “Oh she needs to eat!” and my mom would say “Yeah she does!” Mostly like that though, they are not big on calling people fat or anything. (Marie, Latina, Working class, \$40-69K)

Marie demonstrates that there is such thing as being too skinny, where it is seen as being unhealthy or a product of disordered eating behavior. Emma explained how her mother and sister made comments to remind her that she was too skinny and assumed she was not healthy. Jojo had explained that her sister and step-sister called her thick, but she interpreted that as calling her fat. Size Talk doesn't simply reflect fat talk, it includes the construction of size as being problematic at both extremes, stick thin and fat.

***Health Talk.*** The second most common form of Body Talk was Health Talk. While one woman explained her family's focus on health based on her mother's occupation as a nurse, health seemed to be an important quality to many women who participated in the interview. When participants spoke of the kinds of health benefits they gain from physical activity or eating right, this fell into the theme of Health Talk. Any feedback or remarks about engaging in an activity for health purposes was incorporated in the theme of Health Talk. Health Talk does not appear to be a predictor for positive body satisfaction and shows no patterns based on class or race. Elizabeth (Latina, Lower-Middle class, \$70-124K) gives an excellent example of Health Talk when she talks about how and why she stays active today, “I go to the Lombardi [gym] and run. It's a stress free activity for me. (Elizabeth, Latina, Lower-Middle class, \$70-124K).” As if quoting a health book, the participants often spoke of stress relief, endorphin spikes, and feeling well when they eat right and exercise.

Yet, Health Talk was most often talked about alongside Size Talk. Again, being too skinny or too fat was equated to health status. Kara, a White woman from an upper-middle class household with an annual household income greater than \$200,000 explained the difficulty in managing a healthy identity as a naturally skinny girl:

When I was younger people would make fun of my hip bones sticking out. But I would go back at them saying you can't make fun of fat people, but you think you can make fun of skinny people?... When I was in 6th or 7th grade, I felt bad about my hip bones sticking out. I didn't know what to do about it. I didn't really feel bad about myself it was more like...seeing that I was different. I never really tried to fix it when I was younger. That's more recent. People think I should just eat cheeseburgers, but that's not going to help. I have done that, my freshman year of high school...I noticed I was always tired and getting headaches. So when I have tried to gain weight I tried to stay healthy. (Kara, White, Upper-Middle class, More than \$200K)

Kara is clearly outlining the association between health and size. Is shaming a woman for being too skinny, or stick thin, any different from shaming a woman for being fat? With obesity, anorexia, and bulimia emerging as health problems, it makes sense that size and health overlap in Body Talk.

***Fit Talk.*** Fit Talk was the most unexpected variable. The initial construction of this research project stemmed from the idea that the thin-ideal was still relevant affecting women differently based on race and class. This was presumptuous, that the thin-ideal continues to be the ideal. While it was expected that curvier bodies may be perceived as acceptable and ideal among Latina and Black women, it was not expected that being “fit” would present itself as such a prevalent goal among so many interview participants. The theme of Fit Talk includes when participants explicitly stated that they wanted to be “fit,” “toned,” stay active, or that they were primarily focused on working out. When asked

about how her mother provided feedback on her body, Elizabeth explained that her mother was always interested in encouraging her to “stay fit,”

Because I mean she, when she was growing up she always says she wasn't the best looking, but her body wasn't what she wanted it to be. So she is always trying to take care of my body because she couldn't do it for her own. It's not something that bothered me or anything because it's not like she starved me or anything, just talking to me about how to eat better and work out and stuff like that. Stay fit. (Elizabeth, Latina, Lower-Middle class, \$70-124K)

This also reflects body discourse as a constructive criticism, not meant to tear you down. Being fit represents a certain appearance, but it also includes efforts to maintain healthy habits. Cases in which interview participants specifically utilized fit talk or health talk independently are few. More often, more than one type of Body Talk would be used in the same context. Stephanie provides insight to the way Size Talk and Fit Talk are used in conjunction:

I've always been bigger than my other friends. So it's kind of like, I have always compared myself. I know I am not huge, but I am bigger than my friends. It doesn't really bother me that much, I'm fine with it. But I wish sometimes I was shorter and smaller. I'm sure it has something to do with media and how I want to look like Kim Kardashian, curvy and thin... I don't want to be super skinny, like anorexic, I would like to just look fit. (Stephanie, White, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)

Again, this shows the aversion to being too skinny. The goal to be fit still appears to be related to size evaluations. Alysha explains the kinds of feedback she received from her mother about her own body and demonstrates how being “fit” is also related to evaluations of health:

My mom always encouraged me to do what I wanted to. I did dance, cheerleading, soccer, and if I wanted to do it she never said I couldn't because of my weight. She would only encourage doing it because it might make me healthier or fit. It was about the physical health. (Alysha, Black, Upper-Middle class, \$70-124K)

More often than not, Size Talk, Fit Talk, and Health Talk were used in combination and overlapping ways. Michelle explains the perplexing and integration of all three types of body talk:

In middle school or high school we would do circuits in P.E. and I would always do it because I had fat on my mind. I am also very competitive, I want to be first, I know I can do it and don't want anything less. So fitness is about health and looking a certain way. (Michelle, White, Working class, \$20-39K)

This presents some concerns over the motivations and interpretations of the emergence of Fit Talk. The balance of being fit and healthy but not too thin and not fat. Alysha describes wanting to lose weight, with the dream of being a “fitness couple” with her boyfriend, the kind of couple that is “healthy and fit together” (Alysha, Black, Upper-Middle class, \$70-124K). Fit is constructed as being representative of an ideal, for body size and health measures.

**Body Discipline.** Body Discipline includes the disciplinary methods such as dieting and exercise practices meant to maintain a particular appearance. In some cases this also includes learning how to appropriately dress the body. Body Discipline not only reflects the practices employed by each woman, but the kinds of comments and feedback she received which reflect the values of self-restraint and self-discipline. Ten of the fifteen interview participants had indicated having been on a diet at some point in their lifetime on the questionnaire, but during our conversation I realized that many of them did not approve of calling their behavior dieting behavior. After changing the language to “dietary change,” all interview participants indicated having participated in this form of body discipline. There does seem to be a misconception that “diet” refers to strict menu planning, or limiting oneself to salads and chicken.



Many of these women had changed their diet to enhance performance for sports activities, but even more were looking for ways to lose weight or change their appearance and they were doing it without nutritional guidance. Some of the interview participants explained that they believed just eating less would help them lose weight. For example, Nicole admits that her first diet was unhealthy because she was skipping meals and only having a salad. Michelle changed her diet by cutting down portions and continuing to cut until she was only eating a little bit each day. Michelle said, "I always thought cutting down portions would help more than what you are eating." As a young girl, Louise remembers going to Weight Watchers sessions with her mother, "I learned so much about portion control or whatever, but by the time I had applied those things to myself I just took it to an extreme." Ketema admitted she was not educated on healthy diet practices when her mother proposed a cabbage soup diet to drop pounds quick. It is unclear from the data what factors may play into the lack of education about diets. Several interview participants were learning dieting methods from their parents, particularly their mothers. Many of these women tried their first diet as a team, mothers and daughters losing weight together.

Body Discipline goes beyond the confines of dieting, or dietary changes. Some of the following will reflect the feedback received and continues to demonstrate how Size Talk can take many forms. Body Talk was often intermingled with comments about clothing. The way clothing fits or accentuates body features was a common form of Body Talk and it often led to slut-shaming. When asked about how family members talked about their own bodies, or other women's bodies, participants had explicitly stated that comments were frequently about what they were wearing. Comments about clothing,

slut-shaming (Tanenbaum, 1999), and food-shaming (Frank, 1991) all represent forms of Body Discipline. While a woman may choose to change her diet or exercise routine to engage herself in body discipline, when a significant other comments about their clothing or food intake, body discipline is imposed. Two women who identified as having experienced disordered eating behaviors were explicitly slut-shamed by multiple family members. Clothing comments often carried subtle and implied expectations to maintain a conservative or modest appearance. Michelle explained her transition through puberty, and the feedback she received on how to dress her developing body:

I was the only girl in 3rd grade breaking out and developing. My clothes were fitting tighter, not on purpose, I was just developing. But my dad would tell me to cover up, that I was “looking like a hoochie.” I didn’t get it. I don’t know, I think maybe he expected me to be one or was scared that I would grow up to be a ditsy and open girl. (Michelle, White, Working class, \$20-39K)

Michelle’s recollection of these messages represent the way slut-shaming is imposed on girls to control their sexuality, and their bodies. Presentation of the body is conveyed through clothing, and is often equated to moral standing. These messages about clothing illustrate women’s war with their bodies in the context of the Madonna-whore complex, or in this case the Madonna-“hoochie” complex. Slut-shaming is enforced on these women at a young age to impose values of modesty, to invoke guilt and shame for hypersexuality. Tanenbaum (1999) explained how “slut-bashing” demeans women by equating her identity to her sexual nature.

Food-shaming represents a form of Body Discipline where guilt and shame are imposed upon women for their relationship with food. The purpose appears to be to encourage these women to be aware of their body size. Cristyna, with the lowest BSS score, explained that her mother would cook big Hispanic meals for her brothers, but tell

her not to have any, “I would sneak it, so it made it this guilty relationship with food. In her mind it was helping me. (Cristyna, Latina, Lower-Middle class, \$70-124K).”

Michelle, who developed an eating disorder, explained that her first serious boyfriend was abusive emotionally and physically. In explaining how Michelle came to develop an eating disorder, she described the kinds of comments that this boyfriend made about her body:

My most sensitive area to me is my thighs to my boobs, I don't know why it just is. I told him that one time, I guess I shouldn't have told him that. Every time, even when I was eating he would say “Those will go straight to your thighs.” I would just stop eating and not eat for the rest of the day. While I was with him, towards the end it all got really serious for me. I was super depressed. I was starting to notice that I would eat early on in the morning, very little, and then I wouldn't eat all day and by the end of the day I wouldn't feel good and the only thing that made me feel better was puking. So I started developing this eating disorder. I never saw a doctor about it, because I didn't want to tell my mom or him. Nobody knew, now you and I are the only ones that know...I still have things like I avoid big plates because of what my first boyfriend would say. (Michelle, White, Working class, \$20-39K)

Michelle's recollection of the kinds of food-shaming that her boyfriend imposed on her demonstrates the serious detrimental nature of food-shaming. By creating a problematic, guilty relationship with food, women are at-risk for developing disordered eating behavior and unhealthy disciplinary practices (Frank, 1991).

**Genetic Connections.** The theme for Genetic Connections was used when women communicated that they understood their bodies as a predisposition. There was some overlap between the theme for Genetic Connections and Body Acceptance language like when Alysha said “both my parents are ‘big boned,’ everybody isn't built the same. I've accepted I will never be a size 2.” The theme for Genetic Connections came into play during the section of the interview meant to bring out how family

members talk about their own bodies. In some cases, participants interpreted their mother's negativity about her own body as a warning about their own bodies in the future. Emma and Alex provide two examples of this theme:

I know my mom's not happy with the way she looks... I know she tries but she doesn't stick to diet and exercise... Sometimes she will comment that "Oh these jeans don't fit how they used to"... My mom hasn't shrunk down to what she looked like before pregnancy. She doesn't make comments frequently but enough for me to recognize it. I've thought about when I have kids, I will probably look like my mom, get stretch marks like my mom. It doesn't freak me out but I have thought about it. I hope I can stick to an active lifestyle. (Alex, Latina, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)

Yeah. She used to be my size, fairly thin. She isn't overweight, but she is bigger than she used to be. So she complains a lot about needing to be fit. She comments when she can't wear certain things, like... I don't know what those are called (pokes hips)... love handles and stuff. She doesn't like those. She will comment about that or her stomach not being flat or her boobs being too big. She wants a boob job to make them smaller. I do have her body type, we look a lot alike if you look at her pictures when she was younger. Hopefully I stay like this and don't end up kind of overweight later. Her comments make me think about that. (Emma, White, Upper-Middle class, More than \$200K)

These women hear their mothers talk about their own bodies, and internalize those messages. This may be based on the perception of having a similar body type, or based on their identity as women. The way a mother comments on her own body presents itself as a warning for their future.

**Greatest Impact.** Each participant was asked by the end of the interview, "Who had the greatest impact on how you feel about your body today?" Nicole, who was raised by her father said, "Probably my boyfriend, positively, he is always complimenting me or whenever I say something negative he says 'No, that's not true,' and that helps me feel better." Emma didn't feel that any of her family members had influenced anything, and Elizabeth said that her brother has had the biggest impact because he is always telling her

that she is beautiful. This is consistent with the quantitative data that show the relative importance of siblings and fathers. Every other interview participant said that their mom has had the greatest impact on the way they feel about their body today. Granted it isn't always a positive impact, Cristyna's mother would call her fat behind her back, and even though her aunts were very accepting of diverse bodies Cristyna answered this question with, "I think my mom probably. She is more open about it. Rather than my aunts, they make those weird comments but they never say my body is bad. But my mom openly says it." Jojo explained that the comments from the women in her life carry more weight than the men, "In my mind I guess the only thing I retain is what the females say to me. So then I always hear what they have to say, and that's what I remember. I guess my dad could have said something good about my body I just wouldn't remember, except that time we compared our calves, but when it comes to my mom, my step mom, my sister, or my step sister, I remember what they say a lot more." The importance of mothers shaping their daughter's body satisfaction is significant, and it speaks to the relevance of women's bodies as part of a *culture of women*. Alysha said that her mother was significant because she was "always telling me to be comfortable. (Alysha, Black, Upper-Middle class, \$70-124K)." Ameera said that her mother was significant in defining health practices. Stephanie explained that her mother was significant "because she is very open about her body and it makes me feel better about my body (Stephanie, White, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)." Mothers communicate health and body acceptance, and are perceived as having the greatest impact in shaping participants' body satisfaction.

**Other Themes.** The role of doctors in conveying information about weight came up during the interviews as problematic and hostile. Two women specifically talked

about going to a doctor's office and being told that they needed to lose weight. Alysha, a Black woman from the upper-middle class explained the reason she decided to go on her first diet to change her appearance in middle school was influenced by two things, joining the cheer team and getting a routine physical, "I dread going to hospitals for a check-up, because every time they tell me I am overweight and I come out feeling bad." For Jojo, a Black woman from the lower-middle class, focusing on numbers such as clothing size and weight were already haunting tendencies and was only reaffirmed by her routine visit to the doctor's office:

Middle school is when I started focusing on the numbers. I went to get a physical my freshman year of high school, I weighed 135 and the doctor told me that I needed to lose...well she tried to make it sound nice, she said "Ok, for your height, we ideally want you to be 110ish, try to lower that..." She said to come back and see her in three months to see if I had made any improvement, and I never went back. It's just a physical and I didn't think it was a big deal. But the way she said it, she should have flat out said, you need to lose weight. I think I would have felt better than her trying to be nice and try not to call me fat. (Jojo, Black, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K).

I asked Jojo if the doctor had mentioned any of the health benefits for losing weight, and she said no. It was just about being a specific weight, as if it was a cure-all. Both Alysha and Jojo noted that their dieting and weight concerns stemmed from these interactions with medical professionals. This demonstrates the influence of doctors in communicating the relationship between health and size, and how powerful a doctor can be in impacting self-confidence among growing and developing girls. Rather than talking to a 12-year-old about her weight, a doctor may want to talk to the parents about nutritious options, access to social programs for healthy living, and building a healthy relationship with food and the body. This gives support for the criticisms of the Body Mass Index. While the Health at Every Size movement (ASDAH, 2015) would argue that this approach to health is

incorrect, it is important to see that physicians are speaking with young girls about their weight and health without a proper explanation of health measures. It is interesting that Ameera, whose mother is a nurse, talked about how important it was that her mother educated her on the Body Mass Index and healthy living. Talking about the Body Mass Index in combination with health advice may protect body-image.

Is it a coincidence that these experiences of maltreatment in a doctor's office are both reported by Black women? Maybe, but it could also reflect a history of maltreatment and distrust in a system that serves a White agenda. In the recent past, the Tuskegee Experiments on Black men have resulted in generations of discontent with medical professionals. This may explain the resistance to medical professionals, however the bigger issue is that medical professionals are criticizing young girls for their weight without providing adequate information about their health. Further research is needed to explore how medical professionals discuss weight and health with young girls and how this impacts body image, self-esteem, and overall health.

The major theme presented in the qualitative data is the variation in Body Talk. There was no measurement for variation in Body Talk in the survey, only positive and negative feedback was measured. While it is important to know how feedback is interpreted, it also seems to be important to differentiate between size-oriented, health-oriented, and fit-oriented Body Talk.

**Body Acceptance.** At the end of each interview, I asked the participants if there was anything they would like to add that is relevant to how they have come to know their bodies. Despite the fact that these women could describe methods of Body Discipline and negative Body Talk these women demonstrated an insistence upon body positivity, self-

love, and body acceptance. Even those who demonstrated a marked concern with body shape and the lowest levels of body size satisfaction were able to articulate Body Acceptance. Jojo, who had expressed concern over her size during the interview, also felt that it was important to end the interview with an eloquent statement of self-love:

Everybody's body is different. You have to realize that for you, I had to realize that... When it comes to my body image, I think it's something I will struggle with forever, especially with the media and everything. There is always a perception of what the body is supposed to look like, especially the female body, but then I have to remember, what do I want to look like? Not necessarily like them, but what makes me look like me. (Jojo, Black, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)

The rhetoric for body acceptance among women who had already clearly outlined some discontent over their body size, or their persistence in body disciplinary practices, does not exclude them from being able to articulate self-love. It began to sound like a broken record. At the end of each interview, despite how these women could describe body dissatisfaction they were able to describe the importance of body acceptance. For some, body acceptance overlaps with the pursuit of health as described by Elizabeth:

I just feel like the way I have come to realize I have to accept my body through everything that I've lived. Everything you are going to live through, throughout your years, you are always going to find your body at the end. It's how you feel, not how others feel. If you feel fine then you shouldn't care about how others feel, or what they think of you or how they see you. If you see yourself good, you feel good, and you are healthy, then I really don't care what other people say. (Elizabeth, Latina, Lower-Middle class, \$70-124K)

Christina, a White woman from a lower-middle class family with an annual household income between \$40,000 and \$69,999, explained that her commitment to body acceptance comes from her educational background:

I honestly think that the high school I chose for myself had one of the biggest impact on not only how I feel about myself, my body, but also as a person. I'm not a girl's girl, but my school was so big on women's empowerment, academics, and sports. It made me feel comfortable in my body, made me be who I want to



be. Through high school every year we would have a different women's day, one year we watched Miss Representation, and that was one of my favorite days, most impactful. That was a huge part of my high school, women's empowerment. It was cool, we always had speakers and most of my teachers were alumni, and successful women. (Christina, White, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)

The reliance upon a body acceptance discourse demonstrates the success of the Fat Acceptance Movement and the Self Esteem Movement. It appears that body acceptance is becoming part of dominant body discourse.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was an attempt to discover how discourse about women's bodies in the family are constructed from classed and raced identities, and how these influence body satisfaction among women. The sample of survey respondents were not adequately diverse enough to make any assessment of differences in experiences based on race identities. The interview participants, while diverse in race, do not appear to provide much evidence of differences in body discourse based on raced identities anyhow. Overall, the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis don't provide much evidence of social class differences either.

### Race & Social Class Indicators

During the qualitative analysis, I tried to find any remnant of how race and class may influence body discourse. Based on the sample of my qualitative research, the only clear difference in body discourse by race was that "thick" was only used to describe the body by Latina and Black women, but the meaning varied. Sometimes "thick" and "fit" would be used in conjunction, but sometimes it was explained as a negative descriptor: "My sister and my step sister say I'm 'thick,' and they like my body. But I don't like my body. I don't always know what they are trying to say, I know it because they always use it, but at the same time, in my mind 'thick' isn't a word. In my mind it's either skinny or big. But for them 'thick' is like in-between and good, but to me 'thick' is big and bad (Jojo, Black, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)." Latina, Black, and White women used "thin" to describe the body, but again it was communicated as having both negative and positive associations. Being "stick thin" was perceived as bad or unhealthy, but thinness was still a positive characteristic and described as ideal among women from various

social class and race backgrounds. Ketema and Stephanie provide insight to the ideal as thin (but not too thin), thick (but not big), and the emergence of a fit ideal:

I would say thick hips, but thin waist, stomach, and a nice facial structure, ... and basically having big hips but small waist and small thighs. I don't think that's realistic but I feel like that's what I aim for. (Ketema, Black, Working class, Less than \$20K)

But I wish sometimes I was shorter and smaller. I'm sure it has something to do with media and how I want to look like Kim Kardashian, curvy and thin...I don't want to be super skinny, like anorexic, I would like to just look fit. (Stephanie, White, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)

Overall, the qualitative analysis suggests that the ideal body may not be stratified by raced and classed identities as suggested in previous studies (Brumberg, 1997; as cited in Harris, 2006; as cited in Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; as cited in Kelly et al., 2005; Sira & Ballard, 2009; Sobal & Stunkard, 1989; Striegel-Moore & Franko, 2002).

Interview participants with various class and race identities indicated desire for a healthy and fit ideal. Survey respondents indicated a desire for a curvy, or athletic body with no statistically significant relationship with social class measures. It is important to note, survey respondents who indicated that a skinny body was ideal were also more likely to have lower levels of body satisfaction, and those who preferred an athletic and strong body were more likely to have higher levels of body satisfaction. Preference for these ideal bodies show no relationship with classed identities.

There was one interview participant that explicitly highlighted the importance of race in constructing social reality. Ameera, a Black woman from the lower-middle class explained why her dad was so crucial to her developing her own identity as a Black woman in America:

My dad is really patient and he taught me about where I come from as far as being Black. Because a lot of Black people have identity issues sometimes and he taught me to not be ashamed...He taught me how to grow up to be a Black woman in America. It's a little different than being any other race. (Ameera, Black, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)

However, this theme of what it means to be a Black woman in America did not appear in any of her explanations for body discourse or body disciplinary practices. Before the interview concluded, I wanted to make sure that Ameera had the opportunity to explain this concept further. She explained:

When I was little we would go to the African Market, he would get us Black books by Black authors, our dolls were Black. He taught us where we come from and to look up to certain Black women like Malcolm X's wife, Martin Luther King's wife, he would say these are women who did well in our community. Because I know that some of the kids that I went to high school with look up to people like Nicki Minaj and stuff, I never did that. The focus was on women who make a difference. My mom was the same way, but my dad really enforced it, he wanted me to know so that I would respect myself. (Ameera, Black, Lower-Middle class, \$40-69K)

Ameera's perspective on being a Black woman in America demonstrates how race can shape one's values. Rubin, Fitts, and Becker (2003) had suggested that women of color find new and opposing ways of defining beauty from the dominant White ideals and are thus able to ignore conceptions of the body that are belittling. Ameera did not spend time dwelling upon her body's imperfections. While she was the only woman who explicitly linked her self-respect to her ethnic background, a few women reported that their parents were adamant about not focusing on the body. My sample is not big enough to confirm or challenge the perspective provided by Rubin, Fitts, and Becker (2003), but it would be worthwhile to see how parents' unyielding effort to encourage their daughters to be more than a body is correlated with race identities, and related to self-esteem and body-esteem. Ameera demonstrated no concern with body shape and the highest body

satisfaction among interview participants. It may be due to her identity as a woman of color, it may be that her parents tended to focus on character rather than appearance, or a combination of both.

Past research on assimilation and body image tended to focus on how women of color attempt to gain access to White society by slimming down (Clougher, 2013).

During the interviews, two participants brought another aspect of assimilation to light.

Ketema, a Black woman from the working class describes the difficulty her family faced when they immigrated to the United States from Africa, language barriers kept her parents and uncles working in the service industry, learning language slowly but surely.

Cristyna, a Latina woman from the lower-middle class described having many family members still living in Mexico. What these two women share, is the level of blame their families place on U.S. American culture for fatness. Ketema's father didn't understand why she couldn't be as skinny as her cousins in Africa. Cristyna's grandmother often commented on how all her family members living in the United States are bigger. This illustrates a tendency to see fatness as a symptom of U.S. American culture, but it would be worthwhile to examine how fatness is explained differently based on assimilation measures. These two women demonstrated a marked concern for their body shape and lower levels of body satisfaction. This exemplifies how damaging "fat" talk may be.

In some cases, race identities were used as to justify body size or body satisfaction. Marie, a Latina woman from the working class used her identity as a Latina to reconcile her feelings of being bigger and explained, "Latinas are just curvier, naturally." Kara, a White woman from the upper-middle class described herself as always being on the smaller side, more interested in gaining weight than losing weight. Kara had

reported a high level of body satisfaction and explained “I also think when you have blonde hair and blue eyes, it’s hard to not...I’ve never really heard anything negative about my body. When I was filling out your survey, I was thinking about how lucky I am to be born like this.” It was harder to decide in coding when White women were describing something that may reflect race. I was hoping to have a diverse enough sample from my survey that these sort of trends would reveal themselves in the quantitative data and then inferred from qualitative interviews. Unfortunately, the lack of racial diversity among survey respondents makes it impossible to make conclusions about the relationship between race and body discourse or body satisfaction.

Initially, some of the descriptions of food available in the home were coded as indicators of race, revealing ethnic food trends. Within this theme for ethnic food, what would count for White women in this category? White women also tended to discuss food in their household, therefore many of these which were originally coded as revealing race, were included in the theme of food available in the home. It is unclear if race and ethnicity matter when it comes to the availability of healthy options. Alex and Elizabeth, two Latina women from the lower-middle class explained how the traditional Hispanic dishes are high in protein and fattening foods. Alex explained, “My mom doesn’t cook as often as she used to, but when she did she wasn’t conscious of balancing it, but neither were we.” According to Elizabeth:

My mom cooks every day, and she would cook these big meals...they are good and everything, but coming from a Mexican family and you know, they cook fattening foods. I know I have been to some of my White friends’ houses and they do seem to eat healthier. It does make a difference, the race that you are...I knew we had different types of foods, but they have more salads, more greens, and we have more tortillas and rice. Tortillas and rice are our main dishes.

While the interviews showed some hint of difference in food based on raced identities, there appears to be a conscious effort on the part of parents to provide healthy options, regardless of social class. Jojo, a Black woman from the lower-middle class explained, “Both my parents are from Louisiana, so we do have gumbo and jambalaya and stuff like that...But my mom was really good at making sure we always had a vegetable with our meal...My mom knew her food, and was health conscious for us.” Emma, a White woman from the upper-middle class explained, “My parents already prepared healthy meals for me, and of course we had stuff in the cupboard that wasn’t healthy but we were fairly healthy.” Healthy food does not appear to be a luxury of the upper-class based on these interviews.

Based on the theoretical perspective of Veblen and the “Theory of the Leisure Class,” (2007) one would conclude that women from the upper echelons of society would not only have greater access to healthy food choices, but also have the freedom to participate in frivolous or extra-curricular activities based on the securities provided by their social and economic standing. Nicole, a White woman from the working class stated, “When I was younger my friends would be in all these sports and I couldn’t do that because it was financially impossible for me to do those activities.” Yet, most interview participants had been involved in sports at some point in their life, and the survey data show no trend between social class measures and having been a student-athlete. Other evidence of Veblen’s Theory of the Leisure Class (2007) comes from Emma, a White woman from the upper-middle class, whose family made over \$200,000 annually. Emma described having a very physically active family, which may be a result of her geographic location, “our area in California is healthy and fit, so when we go other

places there are a lot of obese people... We are pretty active and go on hikes and bike rides often.” If the other places she was referring to represent a lower socioeconomic demographic then this would show some support for Veblen’s Theory of the Leisure Class (2007). The interviews demonstrate that cruises and private schools are a luxury of the middle and upper class. One would also assume that the upper class women not only afford things, but can afford free time to partake in meal planning and an exercise routine. Contrary to this theoretical perspective, interview participants from all social class backgrounds had expressed difficulty in balancing work, school, and body disciplinary practices. Since the sample is of college women, perhaps this effect of balance may be better analyzed among working women who are not students. The more roles that a person takes on, obviously the more difficult it is to balance those roles and to incorporate body disciplinary practices in their daily lives. To measure the effect of social class on balance, future research should try to minimize the effect of these many roles. However, this research does show that as women take on more roles the effect of social class may become less relevant.

There is evidence from interviews that body discourse in the family is impacted by social class. A woman from the working class explains why she didn’t let her father know about her insecurities with her body, “I didn’t want to stress him out because he is always stressing about work and I didn’t want to add to that” (Nicole, White, Working class, \$40-69K). Since these interviews were semi-structured and flowed with the information provided by each individual participant, it is unknown from these interviews if upper-middle class women may have felt the same hesitations. Two women who identified as upper-middle class had mentioned during their interviews that they had



openly discussed concerns about their bodies with their mothers and/or their fathers. Perhaps social class allows for engagement in discourse over the body, so long as food is secure, safety is secure, stress is low, then to discuss body insecurity is ok because the priorities have been sustained. For example, when Louise became depressed and developed her eating disorder, it was during a mix of social chaos in her household. Her eating habits and immense weight loss was overlooked not because it didn't matter, but because there were many pressing issues in the household.

The quantitative data show no significant relationship between one's demonstrated body satisfaction and perceived social class, perceived social mobility, or childhood household annual income. Social class measures were not significantly associated with the way survey respondents perceived their mother or father spoke of other women's bodies. Social class measures were not significantly associated with dieting to lose weight, or consideration of having cosmetic alterations. Those who did engage in cosmetic alterations were not all from upper class, well-to-do families. Overall, in addressing the research question, no relationship was found between social class measures and body satisfaction measures.

### **Genetic Connections**

Interview participants had expressed concern about the comments her mother made about herself. Interview participants acknowledged that by having the same body type as their mother made them careful not to gain weight the same ways their mother did. These women didn't want to feel such body angst like their mother does, and this may reflect Goffman's ideas about role-playing. If our mothers have negative perceptions of their own bodies, and we perceive our bodies as genetically similar to theirs, then our

mother's negative criticism of herself becomes a criticism of our own bodies. However, the quantitative data show no significant relationship between the way the respondent perceives that her mother comments on her own body and the respondent's body satisfaction. It may be important to differentiate between women who view their bodies as similar in structure or not. Perhaps the reason there was no significant relationship between how women perceived their mother commented on her own body and the subject's body satisfaction is because the worry expressed by interview participants, that their body will one day have the potential to look like their mother's body, is something too abstract and currently irrelevant so it does not impact current body satisfaction. Maybe as women become parents, these messages that their mother made about her own body become more resonant.

### **Greatest Impact**

Most interview participants and survey respondents are in agreement, that mothers are the most significant role in how they have come to understand and know their own body. This supports Goffman's construction of role-playing, by which children become socialized and learn how to perform gender by taking the role of a significant other. Mothers teach their daughters about gender expectations and their bodies, as explained by Cooley (1992) and Mead (2009) in terms of socialization. The finding that these participants view their mothers as having the greatest impact on how they feel about their bodies may also reflect a culture of women, or cultural feminism in which women understand women's experiences as unique to women.

Chodorow (1989) expands on the work of Freud, providing a feminist approach to psychoanalytic theory to illustrate how girls develop relationships with their mother and

father from constructed feminine and masculine identities. A child's identity is shaped by the inequality that exists in a male-dominated, patriarchal society which maintains fathers as the masculine, dominant figure and mothers as the passive, feminine caretaker. Both mothers and fathers are important in shaping gender constructions within a stratified society. We can't ignore the quantitative findings that demonstrate the importance of the father or father-figure in body discourse and body satisfaction among women. While only 46.6% of survey respondents indicated that their father played a significant role in their development, among those who felt that their father was significant, his feedback, the way he spoke of his own body, and his comments about other women's bodies showed a significant relationship with body satisfaction. Mead (2009) explained the importance of taking the role of the other to experience and practice the expectations of a significant other. While women learn how to perform gender by taking the role of their mother, their father is significant in demonstrating the relationship between men and women. This interactionist approach suggests that the self is developed out of interactions not limited to direct feedback, but would also include those comments about other women. Women first experience the male gaze, the sexual objectification of women's bodies (Mulvey, 1975), from their father directly and indirectly.

How can we explain the overwhelming significance of the mother among survey and interview participants? There may be a significant connection between mother and daughter on the basis of sex and gender socialization. If one's sex, gender, and sexuality reflect a heterosexual identity, then the father may be perceived as significant in modeling the heterosexual relationship between men and women, thus providing an understanding of the importance in how a father imposes a body discourse. However, it is

important to reflect on Chodorow's explanation for the persistence of a mother-daughter relationship based on the culturally accepted role of the mother as caretaker (1989). Do women hold their mother as a significant influence on their body satisfaction because they are both women, or could it be based on being raised in a household which maintains traditional gender expectations in which the mother is caretaker of emotional and physical health? Interview participants noted that their mothers were significant in shaping their dieting practices, teaching them methods and providing the tools. This demonstrates how the mother continues to be a source of health information. Participants also expressed a repugnance toward being "stick thin," as something problematic and unhealthy. With an increasing awareness of the mental and physical health problems associated with eating disorders and the emergence of the Fat Acceptance Movement and Self Esteem Movement, body acceptance discourse may be a tool for combating the illness of an eating disorder. Interview participants frequently expressed the importance of their mother in communicating body acceptance messages which may reflect this connection between body acceptance and health. In other words, with the new orientation toward fitness and health, does body acceptance discourse become part of the health communication provided by mothers?

The fact that there was an association between how women perceived their father spoke of his own body and their reported body satisfaction may be a fluke finding, but suggests that the heteronormative understanding of the father-daughter relationship may not be sufficient to explain how this generation of women come to know their bodies. How can we explain the association between women's body satisfaction and the way they recall their father spoke of his own body? The emergence of an athletic and strong ideal

may make the father more relevant in the construction of body satisfaction. Athletic and strong have long been associated with a masculine ideal. As this athletic ideal evolves to include men and women, it makes sense that this relationship between father and daughter body discourse exists. There may not be a relationship between how the subject perceives her mother spoke of her own body and the subject's body satisfaction due to a generational gap in ideals. This particular generation of women may be challenging traditional gender expectations of the body, which becomes clear in the different forms of body talk and the new fit ideal.

### **A New Ideal Body**

It is important to recognize that those survey respondents who favored an athletic and strong body type were also more likely to experience higher body satisfaction, and those who favored skinny as the ideal were likely to have lower levels of body satisfaction. The favor for athletic, strong, and healthy bodies may reflect the emergence of the "fit ideal" described by interview participants. The desire for a curvy ideal may still represent a reliance on gendered body expectations, a differentiation between the feminine and masculine. In the past, thinness was favored for women and represented gendered expectations to be dainty, take up less space, to be fragile. This new ideal as athletic, fit, and healthy does not mirror those traditional gender expectations. To be athletic, fit, and healthy is accessible by both genders and may be a sign of how this generation is breaking traditional gender expectations. The reason that mothers may have the greatest impact within this new definition of the ideal body, is similar to the conclusions of Al Sabbah et al. (2009) that mothers play a significant role as the source of health information for children. With a new ideal that is oriented toward health, it

would make sense for a mother to play a significant role, not because it is a mother talking to her daughter about women's bodies, but because her mother is a communicator of health, and the goal is to be healthy. Another explanation for a difference in body satisfaction among those who favor an athletic ideal compared to those who desire a skinny ideal may be that "skinny" represents the practice of body discipline to achieve an appearance measure, while "fit" represents an orientation towards a healthy lifestyle. The subject of the fit ideal requires further investigation.

Since an athletic and strong body has in the past been mostly associated with a man's body, it makes sense for the body satisfaction levels to be associated with the way these women perceive their fathers talk about his own body. While this new ideal to be "fit" is accessible to both men and women, it would be interesting to look into how masculinity and femininity are maintained through this new gender-boundless ideal to be "fit." For example, the second most favored ideal body type was "curvy," and the top two most considered forms of cosmetic alterations was breast augmentation and laser hair removal. This demonstrates a possible stratification within this fit ideal that represents feminine and masculine ideal. While "fit" presents a gender neutral goal, it may still exist within gender appropriate performance. In other words, how does one "do gender" in this new fit ideal?

### **Body Talk & Body Acceptance**

Survey respondents were asked to provide information about positive and negative feedback from important and relevant family members. The relationship between feedback and body satisfaction is clear: positive body feedback in the family is significantly associated with higher levels of body satisfaction. This information is

important in answering the research question, but the qualitative analysis demonstrates that body discourse is diverse in nature and goes beyond positive and negative messages. Body discourse is not simply talking about being fat or thin. This is clearly demonstrated by the way “thick” and “thin” are used both positively and negatively, and the ideal body as athletic, curvy, and healthy. Body talk comes in many forms, and will need further investigation of the implications of different types of body talk on body satisfaction.

While there was a distinct avoidance of the F-word, fat, it is unclear from this analysis how the new fit ideal may impact fat-shaming. Since the fit ideal reflects an orientation toward healthy habits, and obesity and fat have been identified as a health ailment, it is plausible that fat-shaming will persist. An added concern, is the same application of shame for fatness is being placed upon those who are labeled “stick thin.” With the increasing social health concern and awareness of eating disorders, being too skinny is described as unhealthy also. These constructions of health in relation to size may also help to explain the way interview participants interpreted comments about size and weight as constructive criticism. With the previous ideal as thin, being called fat or overweight were negative comments about appearance. With the new ideal as fit, being overweight or too skinny are primarily interpreted as comments about health status, not appearance. The comments might be the exact same, but the orientation toward fitness and health may change the interpretation.

Due to the small sample size of interview participants, there is no clear relationship between the different forms of body talk and social class and race identities. It is significant that “fat” talk doesn’t seem to be as prevalent in body discourse as health and fit talk. Young (2005) concluded that “fat” talk is taken-for-granted in the process of

learning about the body, and that young girls come to understand and even hate their bodies in response to what they hear their mothers say and do to their own bodies. Think back to the introduction and what Kasey Edwards said about learning from her mother that fat is ugly and horrible, and if her mother considers herself fat, then it is only a matter of time before she also becomes fat, ugly, and horrible. Yet, the quantitative research shows no relationship between how the respondent reported their mother commented on her own body and their body satisfaction. What could explain this change? Are negative self-reflections becoming so commonplace that they hold no value? Is the increasing presence of body positivity offsetting these negative messages? Or does the transition to a fit ideal make “fat” talk outdated?

How does the change in body discourse impact body satisfaction? Kelly et al. (2005) found that families who discussed health as opposed to weight significantly impacted body esteem. Unfortunately, the survey instrument was not prepared in a way to measure these different forms of body talk and cannot be measured and compared with body satisfaction. It is important to note here, that “fat” talk does not show any relationship with social class or race category based on data collected from the interview participants. Size talk was the most common type of body talk, and does include references to “fat.”

Fit talk was a very common form of body talk, but was often used in combination with size talk and health talk. The question is whether or not “fit” is a new variable, or perhaps a glorified expression for size talk or health talk. My first instinct was to dismiss Fit Talk as a façade, a linguistic camouflage. This was primarily based on my experience seeing “thinspiration” and “fitspiration” images online that always seemed to be the same



photo, with different language (See Appendix VII: Fitspiration vs. Thinspiration). But, the question is, how does the language actually change the interpretation? If the discourse changes from “I’m so fat” to “I want to be fit,” what are the psychological and mental health effects? The quantitative analysis shows that when women perceived an Athletic and Strong body as being ideal, they were also more likely to experience higher levels of body satisfaction, suggesting that the new fit ideal has positive body esteem outcomes among women.

While the quantitative analysis did not show any relationship between those who viewed athletic and strong bodies as ideal and their social class, among qualitative participants fit talk shows a very clear distinction by social class. Three out of the four working class women did not employ fit talk during their interviews. This may demonstrate some support for Veblen’s Theory of the Leisure Class (2007). Becoming “fit” may require access to gym memberships and nutritional information not accessible among working class women. Bourdieu (1984) talked about cultural and class tastes, and maybe this concept of “fit” is a classed taste, but the quantitative assessment of the ideal body does not show athletic or strong to be connected with social class measures. Further research is needed to assess this relationship between fit talk and social class.

Furthermore, of the four women who did not use fit talk during their interview, two indicated a marked concern with their body shape. It appears that fit talk allows for greater body positivity. This relationship will need to be explored in future research.

### **Limitations**

This study's analysis is limited based on the small sample size for both the quantitative and qualitative research. The survey sample lacks racial diversity despite efforts to reach out to diversity organizations on-campus. Interview participants were diverse, but a larger sample of Black and Latina women would have been useful to compensate for the lack of racial diversity in the survey sample. Furthermore, the findings from the interviews proved some faults in the survey construction. The survey was constructed on the assumption that thinness was still a cultural ideal. The qualitative analysis revealed that body discourse reflects various themes and not just the thin-ideal. This created an unfortunate disconnect between survey results and interview analyses. Both samples are of students, thus measures of social class may be skewed by this identity. Nonetheless, the qualitative and quantitative analyses provide significant support for continuing research in the area of body discourse and body satisfaction.

### **Future Research**

Future studies on body discourse and feedback, would do well to create survey questions that force the respondent to choose either positive or negative. Large portions of our samples indicated hearing or receiving "mixed messages" which was statistically difficult to assess. In addition, the selection process which allowed participants to only answer questions about body discourse for those family members who they felt were most important to their development reflects a qualitative approach to the quantitative research. If participants were forced to respond about their mother/mother-figure and father/father-figure, instead of asking the respondents who they felt had the greatest impact on the way they perceive their own body, the data would have produced a

statistical result. The reason participants were given the option to choose, was under the consideration that respondents may have diverse households with both a mother and a mother-figure, a father and a father-figure, without being able to lump two family members together in terms of interactions and feedback. This should be considered in future research, but does not discount the importance of this research in demonstrating how respondents perceive their family members as important.

The clear resistance to dieting and the value for a healthy, fit body suggests that the Fat Acceptance Movement and the Self Esteem Movement have made great strides. However, it is important to note, body acceptance is not the antithesis to body discipline or body talk. These are not mutually exclusive categories. Wanting to lose weight, or wanting to look a certain way by changing one's diet and exercise routine, does not inherently indicate a negative self-image. While there was an association between survey respondents who have dieted to lose weight and a lower body satisfaction, it is equally important to note that many interview participants showed an aversion to the word "diet," and that body disciplinary practices to be healthy or fit may not show the same relationship. Body Discipline does not inherently imply a negative self-image. Respecting your body by engaging in healthy habits is one of the best ways to love your body. This continues to exemplify an apparent body evolution. Not only is fat the new F-word, but self-love appears to be becoming part of normative body discourse. Future research should assess whether or not we are transitioning into an era of body acceptance, or if the discourse which may be labeled as body acceptance is a form of camouflage, an approved discourse for the same old game. Furthermore, is there a generational gap? How do women of different ages identify the ideal body and participate in body discourse?

Future research in the area of fit talk should compare the meaning and significance of fit talk with fat talk and thin talk. The fact that fit talk often appeared in combination with size talk suggests it may not be that different from the thin-ideal. How do health talk, fit talk, and body acceptance talk impact body satisfaction compared to size and fat talk? Future research in the area of body satisfaction needs to look at the complexities of discourse about the body. Furthermore, since fit represents an ideal, not bound by gender expectations, these same measures can be assessed for men and women. With access to a sample with greater diversity, race and social class should continue to be assessed in shaping the social reality that the body, body discourse, and body acceptance is situated in.

### **Conclusions**

The quantitative and qualitative research for this study show that the way women come to know their bodies is more complicated than factors of race and class. While my quantitative data lack racial diversity and reflect a sample of college students thereby possibly diffusing measures of social class, it is interesting to note the lack of significance that social class measures had on body discourse and body satisfaction. Among the sample of college women who participated in the interviews, there was no apparent relationship between race identity and how these women have come to know their bodies, or talk about bodies. In addition, in the quantitative analysis social class indicators were not associated with how women would describe the ideal body. It is interesting to note that the thin-ideal is clearly detrimental to women's body satisfaction, those survey respondents who indicated that being skinny was ideal were also more likely to have lower levels of body satisfaction. The emergence of "fit" in the interviews may

also reflect how survey respondents are describing the new ideal as athletic and strong, which was significantly associated with higher levels of body satisfaction. This new ideal for being “fit” does not appear to be stratified by classed or raced identities.

Naomi Wolf (1991) concluded that “the beauty myth” was demeaning and distracting, keeping women from pursuing meaningful endeavors. Young (2005) demonstrated similar concerns over “fat talk,” damaging women’s self-confidence and creating a war between women with different bodies. This may be fading from reality. “The beauty myth” (Wolf, 1991) was detrimental due to its reliance on traditional gender expectations, that feminine identity is linked to being subject to men’s desires. How does the new gender-breaking ideal as fit, strong, and healthy reflect a social transition of women establishing a presence in the professional world and achieving identities that are not solely attached to being a woman in a man’s world? The transition from doing good things in the community, to looking good was exemplified in Brumberg’s analysis of diary entries from the late 1800s to the late 1900s (1997). If this research is evidence of a transition to a body acceptance era, then I wonder what a diary analysis would show for young women in 2015. Did this New Year’s resolutions reflect health and fitness goals for the sake of self-improvement and self-love? Is the body project of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the fit project?

## Appendix I: Qualitative Recruitment Flyer

# Participate in a study about Women's Bodies

- **Must be a woman between the ages of 18 and 25, and does not identify as a mother**
- Participate in an interview about how you have constructed meaning in your body
- Interviews last up to 1 hour, conducted in English, and tape recorded for accurate reporting
- Take a supplementary survey about your body satisfaction and familial interactions
- Interested participants will be screened based on the needs of the research
- Participants will remain anonymous in reporting
- Each participant interviewed will receive \$5 as a thank you!

**Contact Elizabeth Martinez:  
[ElizabethMMartinez2@gmail.com](mailto:ElizabethMMartinez2@gmail.com) or (916)532-5480**

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## Appendix II: Qualitative Recruitment Screening

From: Elizabeth Martinez <elizabethmmartinez2@gmail.com>  
To: "Jane Doe" <janedoe@email.com>  
Subject: Research on Women's Bodies

Jane,

Thank you so much for reaching out to me, I truly appreciate the support. If you are a woman between the age of 18 and 25, and do not identify as a mother you are qualified to participate in an interview. The interview should only last 30 minutes to an hour. Along with the interview I will need you to complete an online survey about your body satisfaction and family interactions:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/InterviewParticipantsBodySatisfaction>

When are you free to meet for the interview next week? I'm available Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday starting at 1:00 to make an appointment. We will meet in the UNR library in a group study room. Exact location will be scheduled when we agree on a time. All interview participants receive \$5 as a thank you.

Thank you again! If you have any questions about the research let me know.

Elizabeth Martinez  
(916) 532-5480  
ElizabethMMartinez2@gmail.com

**Appendix III: Quantitative Recruitment Flyer**

# Women's Body Size Satisfaction Survey

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/body satisfaction>

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This study includes a survey of **women between the ages of 18 and 25, who are not mothers**. The survey will include questions about body satisfaction and family interactions about the body.

We are interested in how you relate to your body, and the types of messages you received about the body within family interactions. Thank you for your time and participation in this study.

Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any questions:

Elizabeth Martinez  
[ElizabethMMartinez2@gmail.com](mailto:ElizabethMMartinez2@gmail.com)  
(916) 532 - 5480

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## This study is also available for SONA Social Research Credit

If your class offers extra credit for participation in social research through the SONA Social Research program, please find my study (#86833) to receive credit for participation.

1 SONA Credit  
Duration: up to 30 minutes  
Study #86833



#### Appendix IV: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Paint a picture for me, what was it like growing up in a (SOCIAL CLASS / RACE) household that made (ANNUAL INCOME)?
2. What was the composition of your family growing up? Who do you recall being around for most of your childhood and development?
3. Which of these relationships were the most crucial to your identity?
4. Tell me about your Mother/Mother-Figure. What is your relationship like with your Mother/Mother-Figure?
  - a. Do you recall hearing any messages from your mother or mother-figure about your body? What were they like?
  - b. Can you recall a specific instance, or a more general sentiment, that your mother or mother-figure had expressed about her own body?
5. Tell me about your Father/Father-figure. What is your relationship like with your Father/Father-Figure?
  - a. Do you recall hearing any messages from your father or father-figure about your body? What were they like?
  - b. Can you recall a specific instance, or a more general sentiment, that your father or father-figure had expressed about his own body?
6. Do you recall any other messages from your parents about women's bodies more generally?
7. Do you have any siblings?
  - a. Are you close?
  - b. Do you recall any discussion about the body, whether it's your body or their body?
8. Have you ever been on a diet? Why?
  - a. How old were you the first time you went on a diet?
  - b. Was it your choice?
  - c. Was it encouraged by a family member?
9. Between these two figures, which do you feel had a greater impact on your body satisfaction today?
  - a. Is there someone I have not asked about that has had even greater influence on the way you perceive your body?

## **Appendix V: Qualitative Consent Sheet**

### Consent Information Sheet

If you are a woman between the ages of 18 and 25 and are not a mother, you are eligible to volunteer to participate in this face-to-face interview being conducted by a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at University of Nevada, Reno. The purpose of this interview is to understand and complicate the subject of body satisfaction. The results will be used in a graduate thesis study and presented for educational purposes.

This interview will take about one hour of your time. All of the information collected will be entirely anonymous. All interviews will be recorded for accurate data reporting, and saved to a password-protected data file. No identifying information will be collected. This study is considered to be minimal risk of harm. This means the risk level is typical to those encountered during your daily activities. We would like to thank you ahead of time for your participation. For participating in this study you will receive \$5 as a thank you.

The researchers and the University of Nevada will treat your identity with professional standards of confidentiality and protect it to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study. The researchers, the Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), the University of Nevada, and the Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board may look at your study records.

You may ask questions of the researcher at any time. The contact email address for Elizabeth Martinez is [ElizabethMMartinez2@gmail.com](mailto:ElizabethMMartinez2@gmail.com). There is an office that provides oversight called the Office of Human Research Protection. If you have any concerns on the conduct of the study, call the office at 775-327-2367. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop at any time.

## Appendix VI: Quantitative Consent Sheet

### Informed Consent Statement

**If you are a woman between the ages of 18 and 25 and are not a mother, you are eligible to volunteer to participate** in this online survey being conducted by a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at University of Nevada, Reno. The purpose of this survey is to understand and complicate the subject of body satisfaction. The results will be used in a graduate thesis study and presented for educational purposes.

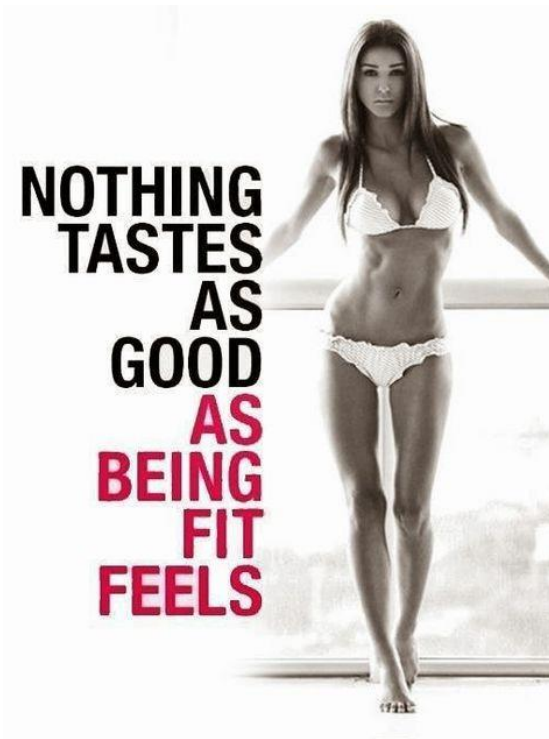
This survey will take about 30 minutes of your time. All of the information collected will be entirely anonymous. All answers will be encrypted before they are saved to a password-protected data file. No identifying information will be collected. This study is considered to be minimal risk of harm. This means the risk level is typical to those encountered during your daily activities. We would like to thank you ahead of time for your participation. There are no direct benefits to you in this study activity.

The researchers and the University of Nevada will treat your identity with professional standards of confidentiality and protect it to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study. The researchers, the Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), the University of Nevada, and the Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board may look at your study records.

You may ask questions of the researcher at any time. The contact email address for Elizabeth Martinez is [ElizabethMMartinez2@gmail.com](mailto:ElizabethMMartinez2@gmail.com). There is an office that provides oversight called the Office of Human Research Protection. If you have any concerns on the conduct of the study, call the office at 775-327-2387. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop at any time.

**\*1. If you agree to participate, please indicate your eligibility and click "Next" below to proceed to the survey. Thank you for your participation!**

Appendix VII: Fitspiration vs. Thinspiration



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