

WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: CONCEPTUALIZING ADOLESCENT
FEMALE BODY IMAGE FORMATION THROUGH PHOTOVOICE

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Body image is a multi-dimensional concept that can affect many facets in adolescent females' lives. The social comparison theory is a widely utilized theory when studying body image. This theory framed around the premise that individuals rely on comparisons made in a social environment. This purpose of this study was to investigate the sociocultural factors that influence adolescent female body image—largely focusing on mass media. This focus was to broaden and explore the normative assumptions in research on body image and to support the development of youth led initiatives appropriate for young people. To achieve this study is divided into four studies. The first article contains a systematic literature review that examines previous studies regarding media and the formation of adolescent female body image perceptions. The second, third and fourth articles utilize Photovoice methodologies to explore the overall concept of body image in relation to sociocultural factors and the media. Finally, the social comparison theory is utilized to assess these issues from a theoretical standpoint. All participants in this study displayed characteristics of individuals with positive body image and therefore offer a unique lens to conceptualize body image. Based on findings, it remains necessary to continue to accurately understand the body of literature as it relates to these populations since recent focus has shifted away from adolescents and the media in the United States. These findings also related a need for understanding media in a sociocultural context.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work and this degree, to my wonderful parents and John Michael.

Without your support this would not have been possible.

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I would like to begin by thanking my family and friends. You have provided a great support group for me. I would not have made it through without your help, love, and support. My parents and John Michael especially have served as my rock through this process and for that, I'm eternally grateful.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Body image is widely studied and has been shown to effect humans in a myriad of ways. Humans' outward appearances as well as their internal experiences related to the body have physiological powers that reach far beyond an objective or social "reality" of appearance (Cash, 2004). This topic been studied through different lenses and throughout a vast array of disciplines. Previous research originates in the field of neurology and for a time, was dominated by clinical psychology and psychiatry (Cash, 2004; Cash & Smolak, 2011). However, following many conceptual and psychometric breakthroughs in body image research in the 1990s, this subject matter remains pertinent to the field of youth development in order to address the mental and health related issues that accompany body image disturbances (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Smolak, 2011). This is largely due to the fact that previous research has been driven by an overreaching concern that poor body image creates barriers for the development of healthy lifestyles, self-esteem, and positive social interactions (Smolak, 2011; Cash, 2004; James, 2000; Grogan, 2007).

The most widely used definition of body image is "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears to ourselves" (Nabi & Oliver, 2009; p. 395). However, body image is not static and research has made it clear that there are multiple dimensions to consider when conducting body image research. This is largely attributed to the fact that

individuals and their subjective experiences of what their bodies look like have been found to be more physiologically powerful than the visual reality. Therefore, one's body related self-perception, self-attitude, and overall thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviors toward their body and health should be considered when conducting body image research (Cash, 2004, p. 1).

Body dissatisfaction is another widely studied aspect of body image research. Body dissatisfaction, or the "subjective disapproval of one's own body shape or form and the belief that it is unattractive to others" (Ferguson, 2013, p. 20) is known to lead to disordered eating, lessened physical activity and lowered self-esteem in young people (Liechty, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2006; James, 2000; Stice & Shaw, 2002).

These potential risk behaviors and the effects of body dissatisfaction are especially relevant when viewing body image through a positive youth development lens, as the positive youth development framework postures that youth need certain psychological and physical assets to thrive and transition into adulthood. Some of the psychological assets include self-esteem, positive body image, and positive values toward physical activity. These psychological assets are said to lead to positive physical assets such as physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle. Many factors mediate, moderate, and perpetuate negative and positive body image in young children. These factors can include peers, friends, family, culture, and mass media. These are known as sociocultural factors and are represented in various ways throughout our society. All of these factors will be

considered as a basis and rationale for the following research. The purpose of this study is to review previously conducted body image research, as well as relate this research to the sociocultural factors that influence adolescent female body image.

To achieve this, a social ecological perspective is utilized throughout the following study in order to broaden and explore the normative assumptions of research on body image and to support the development of youth led initiatives appropriate for young people. This study will examine these issues while utilizing the theoretical underpinnings of the Social Comparison Theory (SCT) and will employ previous research to frame body image issues at a micro-level with adolescent females in a county in central Texas.

The SCT is a widely utilized theory when studying body image and is framed around the premise that individuals rely on comparisons made in a social environment because humans are naturally driven to self-evaluate and collect information about the world around them. In other words, humans are fundamentally motivated and driven to know and collect information (Warren, 2006).

Comparisons are categorized in two ways: *upward and downward*. *Downward comparisons* occur when an individual compares oneself to someone “worse off” in a particular dimension of interest and is believed to enhance subjective well-being and self-perception. *Upward comparisons* occur when an individual compares oneself to someone who is “better off” on the dimension of interest and is believed to decrease well-being (Morrison Kalin, & Morrison, 2004).

In relation to body image, perceptions of relative standing can influence many of the abovementioned positive outcomes, including a person's self-concept, level of aspiration, and feelings of well-being. While all of these outcomes are internal and subjective, the comparison process is a core element (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). The SCT also suggests that when people compare themselves to an individual whom they want to look like, thus enacting an upward comparison, their overall self-regard and well-being decrease (Lin & Kulik, 2002) and body dissatisfaction increases (Tiggemann & Slater, 2004). This dissatisfaction has been attributed to the internalization of body image—a central component in the development of body dissatisfaction (Sands & Wardle, 2003; Cash, 2004).

In order to provide a visual representation of the projected processes associated with the formulation of adolescent female body image the researcher has postulated the following exploratory model (Figure 1). This model served as the overreaching hypothesis of the entire study. Upon conclusion, the results of this study aided in further shaping and formulating this model.

This model aims to outline the processes that oftentimes take place in the formation of body image. In the context of this study, it was initially believed that mass media—often considered most pervasive social transmitter acts as the overreaching sociocultural factor in the formation of body image. The model further hypothesizes that when youth are exposed to these various forms of mass media, they utilize social comparison processes to process the information. Research revolving around sociocultural factors also led me, the researcher, to believe that family, peers, friends, community, and ethnic characteristics often mediate the effects of the pervasive mass media market and the comparisons that take place between youth and mass media. These mediating factors were then believed to aid in various aspects of body image formation. This formation can be negative or positive and lead to various outcomes. To begin to properly deconstruct and solidify this model, several studies were needed. These studies are outlined in the following sections.

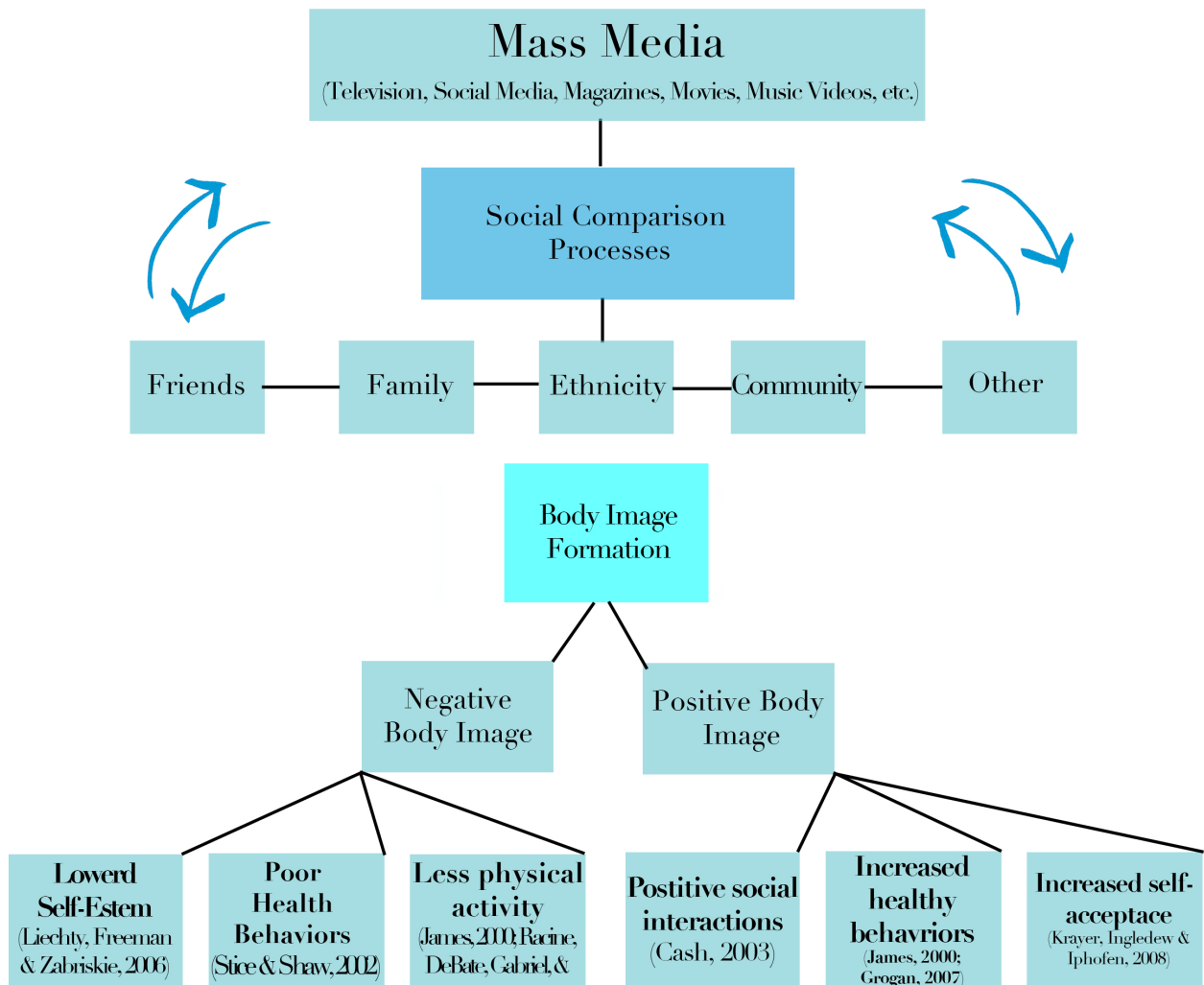


Figure 1: Formulation of Body Image for Adolescent Female

Purpose of the Study

This purpose of this study was *to investigate the sociocultural factors that influence adolescent female body image*. This focus was to broaden and explore the normative assumptions in research on body image and to support the development of youth led initiatives appropriate for young people. The research is divided into four distinct but related studies that will be developed through the preparation of four articles dealing with different aspects of the topic:

Article 1: *What are the key findings from previous research regarding the influence of media on shaping adolescent females perceptions of their body? A systematic literature review was conducted to examine previous studies regarding media and the formation of adolescent female body image perceptions.*

Article 2: *How do adolescent females conceptualize and understand the various socio-cultural influences (e.g., individual, family, and community characteristics) on body image perceptions? The overall concept of body image was explored in this study in order to understand how the target population views factors that influence body image perceptions.*

Article 3: *What level of awareness do adolescents have regarding how media imagery and influences body image perceptions? This study examined the perceptions that adolescent females have regarding the influence of media imagery on body image perceptions.*

Article 4: *How do various sociocultural factors impact the extent to which adolescent females utilize social comparison processes to construct personal body*

image? Factors that shape adolescent females attitudes and their beliefs related to their own body image were examined. Particular attention was focused on the assumptions associated with social comparison processes and their influence in the construction of personal body image.

Overview of the Study

This dissertation is organized in manuscript style. Accordingly, Chapters two through five are formatted independently in order to prepare and submit for publication as manuscripts in peer reviewed journals. This style differs from the traditional format as each chapter contains its own respective literature review and ends with its own collection of relevant findings. Although these studies are formatted separately, they are linked in many ways and serve as a cohesive compilation of research.

This study was essential to informing scholars, researchers, and youth practitioners in a tangible and applied manner. It is with hope, that this study and its community outreach potential upon conclusion, will not only empower the youth from within their community but inform stakeholders and scholars of the struggles young women face regarding their body image in order to create and enact proper interventions to motivate youth to pursue healthy behaviors and strong mental projections of one's body image as they travel into adulthood.

In this chapter I have provided a background to the study and contextualized this research in terms of the SCT. I have also provided an overview

of an exploratory model that served as the overreaching hypothesis for this research.

Chapter 2, the first manuscript, served to present a larger picture of previous research on body image and the media in the form of a systematic literature review. Studies from multiple research databases were collected in order to begin contextualizing body image research in regards to the adolescent female population. This study served to provide me with justification for three other studies. These studies are presented in the third, fourth, and fifth manuscripts and utilized largely qualitative data to expand on the research summarized in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three utilized Photovoice methodologies to give an overview of how youth constructed body image. These constructions were based on sociocultural factors such as individual, family, and community characteristics.

Chapter Four utilized the media as a lens of viewing body image issues and challenges for adolescent females and focuses on the aforementioned sociocultural factors and their interaction with outside media influences in the formation of body image.

Chapter Five focuses on the Social Comparison Theory. The social comparison processes utilized by the youth are explored as well as new areas of research utilizing this theoretical base for the study of body image.

Finally, in *Chapter Six*, I conclude with a discussion summarizing the findings of this project, a reflection from the girls on the process, limitations to the

research, implications and contributions, and an outline of future body image research as a whole.

Studies in Chapter Three through Five utilized modified Photovoice methodologies in order to facilitate a relationship between the youth in the sample and myself to further inform the body image formation process. This partnership was of utmost importance as the youth in this study were considered the foremost experts of their own lives in regards to body image formation. Photovoice is inspired by the concept of youth voice and community based participatory research and was utilized in order to provide deep insight to the day-to-day lives of participants. This methodology was created by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris and involved providing people with cameras in order to allow them to document their everyday lives and realities. This process is rooted in democratic principles and is based on the concept that photographs can be utilized as a tool to teach, provide narratives to various issues, and ultimately influence policy. This approach was appropriate when seeking to understand how adolescent females construct their body image since Photovoice is known for its ability to provide deep insight and narratives to underrepresented populations. Here, youth served as an underserved population as they often hold little power within the community (Wang, 2008).

To collect ample data, I met twice with each group of girls at three different sites—a total of 6 meetings. During the first meeting at each site, youth were taught about the concept of body image and filled out a short 7-question survey. This

survey requested information about perceived body image satisfaction, media usage, and demographic information. I then interviewed youth one-on-one to gain a deeper understanding of their body image as well as possible social comparison processes. Finally, I oriented the girls on the guidelines and expectations of the Photovoice process and gave youth 10 days to take photographs. After the 10 days, I met with youth again to participate in Sharing Circles. The youth were asked several questions that probed at why they chose certain photos and how they pertained to body image. The Sharing Circles functioned much like a traditional focus group and served as an outlet for the youth to share their information with not only myself but also their peers.

It is also notable to add that when instructing youth on taking photographs, I employed a modification to traditional Photovoice methodologies in order to gain further insight to the girls' lives. This modification included limiting the youth to only taking "selfies" (i.e. self-portraits) when representing their body image in photographs. Youth were permitted to include photos of other girls in the project, but were not allowed to take photos of places, objects or others in their community and homes. This was done to allow youth to be self-reflexive when considering how they formulate body image. Therefore, by only being able to photograph themselves the youth were forced to consider many aspects of their lives regarding their body image. Youth also had to articulate how they situated themselves in various aspects of their lives during the Sharing Circle portion of the study. This allowed youth to further consider how their body image related to their photos.

This modification resulted in many photographs that provided unique visual representations of body image and are displayed and discussed throughout each of the following studies.

The design of this study was of course not without limitations as youth were all from the same Central Texas community. Although this community is diverse and the sites were chosen purposefully, the researcher was only able to contextualize results to this particular community. Additionally, since youth were only allowed a 10-day time period to take their photos, it is likely there were other aspects of their body image that were unable to be captured. Furthermore, although the modification of the Photovoice methods was beneficial in many ways, the act of taking selfies also limited the youth, as they were unable to photograph individuals in their lives (such as siblings and parents) that may have also impacted their body image.

With this in mind, the benefits of this study were twofold. Firstly, the stories and visual representations of the processes that take place within a community regarding body image are unmatched by previous research. This is largely due to the fact that these topics are still being explored at a microlevel (Cash, 2004). Secondly, the youth who participated in this study also became empowered throughout the data collection process as principals of youth voice were employed. Youth voice operates per the understanding that young people are the best advocates for their needs and best understand what youth audiences need and want (Checkoway, 2011). This has been noted with great success as youth feel a sense of

belonging and trust when adults seek and employ their ideas (Zeldin & Leidheiser, 2014). Examples of successes are endless as youth become more engaged and motivated to participate in activities where they feel valued and respected (Checkoway, 2011).

Terminology Used in Study

It is important to also understand the terminology utilized throughout this study. Body image employs many terms to describe various aspects of body image therefore distinctions are necessary. Additionally, since the study utilized the voices of youth participants, the terms and lingo employed remained intact throughout the research.

Selfie- a self-portrait photograph, typically taken with a hand-held digital camera or camera phone.

Mass Media- any of the means of communication that reaches very large numbers of people.

Social Media- The websites and applications considered as collectively constituting a medium by which people share messages, photographs, and other information, especially in online communities or forums based on shared interests or backgrounds.

Emoji- A standardized ideogrammatic icon, as of a face or a heart, used especially in electronic messages or on webpages

CHAPTER II

BODY IMAGE AND THE MEDIA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Introduction

Body image is defined as a multidimensional concept that includes the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes related to one's own body (Jung & Peterson, 2007) or the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears to ourselves" (Nabi & Oliver, 2009; p. 395). This topic has been widely studied in multiple areas of academia. As noted by Ferguson (2013), researchers often focus on the concept and contributors to body dissatisfaction. This involves "subjective disapproval of one's own body shape or form and the belief that it is unattractive to others" (p. 20). Body dissatisfaction is most common among women and is often perpetuated by a slew of factors prevalent in western society (Ferguson, 2013). These factors can include peers, friends, family, culture, and the media. These are known as sociocultural factors and are represented in various ways throughout our society.

Adolescence is a particularly interesting time for body image formation as youth are navigating through the confusing time between childhood and adulthood. For adolescent females, this is an especially difficult time in terms of body image formation as they are often experiences various side effects of body changes due to puberty. This is also a period when skin, hair, facial characteristics, muscularity, and strength are in various phases of transformation. Moreover, adolescence represents a phase of maturation where appearance related goals surface. The

importance of physical attributes is often inflicted on young people due to mass media channels (Racine, DeBate, Gabriel, & High, 2011).

Mass media is known to reinforce and often spread negative attitudes about an individual's body. Additionally, the effect of media is problematic as adolescents do not always possess the cognitive skills to understand messages transmitted through the media and are experiencing a time of substantive social and physiological change. Youth are also exposed to a dense amount of media messages during this life stage and often seek television, magazines, and the Internet to cope with the changes of adolescence. This type of information seeking can aid adolescents through coping processes when dealing with real-life issues. However, this can also inadvertently contribute to negative body image constructions, as youth will sometimes begin to observe discrepancies between media characters and ideals and their actual body size leading to body dissatisfaction (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007). This age group is also believed to be extra vulnerable to messages set forth in the media because they are seeking to obtain and solidify their self-identity by accessing these media outlets and continually comparing themselves to the perfect images displayed on television and in magazines (Myers, & Biocca, 1992).

As youth continue to accept media messages and use these messages to evaluate themselves, the external pressure preserves gender identities for girls and boys alike (Polce-Lynch et al., 2001). To demonstrate this effect, one study showed even five minutes of exposure to a media-idyllic woman increased negative body

image perception in young girls (Yamamiya et al., 2005) as the young girls could recognize differences between the bodies of women on television and those they see in real life.

Multiple studies across disciplines show that mass media significantly lowers self-esteem and decreases physical activity (Racine, DeBate, Gabriel, & High, 2011; James, 2000), which further strengthens the argument that youth are easily swayed by these images. It has been proven that the media contributes to heightened negative body image because the media endorses thin, idealistic women and attempts to define the importance of beauty (Myers & Biocca, 1992).

The media also represents a salient example of the pervasive messages regarding body ideals that inundate youth during adolescence. One meta-analysis found that the media exposure is robustly linked to women's generalized dissatisfaction with their bodies, increased investment in appearance. This type of dissatisfaction is then linked to increased participation in disordered eating behaviors (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). This analysis was however, conducted prior to the onset of the technological changes experienced in western culture in recent years. Factors such as online streaming television, social media, and the prevalence of smart phones are now thought to contribute to greater access to media channels for young people.

Therefore, following a review of currently published systematic reviews on this topic it remained clear that a thorough and updated systematic review was necessary to drive quality and cohesive research across various disciplines. This is

especially crucial as these topics transcend disciplines and have been analyzed in this manner very little. All in all, the media can drastically impact young girls early in life and a firm understanding of these impacts is foremost in order to adequately understand why young girls see their bodies as barriers to physical recreational activities. This is especially true as we live in an era where young girls are bombarded with media images and other forms of media and this can consequently impact perceptions of their weight and overall appearance (Liechty, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2006). Media is also a topic that continually changes with technological advancements.

Several systematic reviews found in the initial research process were examined in order to determine relevance for the proposed study. Seven reviews were discovered and found irrelevant for this research, as many did not utilize the same proposed inclusion criteria, while others did not focus on the adolescent female population. Thus, there is a need for a current systematic literature review on this topic and this form of analysis is helpful in order to make sense of such a large body of information (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008).

This review aimed to: (1) review the influence media has in shaping adolescent females perceptions of their bodies, and (2) provide recommendations to frame future research on body image perceptions among youth and the. This will aid future scholars in pinpointing populations and focus areas that are in need of further exploration. Table 1 details the steps that will guide the systematic review process

Table 1

Systematic Literature Review Steps

Steps	Description
1. Determine the research question.	Research Question: <i>What are the key historical, social, visual, and cultural influences shaping adolescent females perceptions of their body?</i>
2. Determine the research protocol.	<p>The following search terms will be used during the initial database search: adolescent, female, girls, body image, body perceptions, media, and history. The researcher will also create a list of inclusion criteria that will guide the article screening process. These may include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Is it written in English? 2) Was the study conducted in the United States? 3) Was the study conducted on females? 4) Was the study conducted on middle school aged (adolescent) students? 5) Did the study focus on the effects of the media? 6) Did the study focus on body image?
2. Perform the literature search.	<p>A reference librarian will assist with performing a database search in the following databases: PsychINFO, Sociological Abstract, Academic Search Complete, Comm & Mass Media and Comm abs to gather articles for review. All articles that result from the search will be placed in RefWorks (or a suitable database management system), a program that allows the user to transfer, organize, and label academic literature.</p>
4. Select studies for review.	Through RefWorks, the researcher will review each abstract pulled during the database search and use the screening questions to determine which studies will move on to the full reading.
4. Conduct the data extraction.	The researcher will create a list of what data she desires to pull from the studies and organizes these categories in an Excel spreadsheet. Studies that passed the initial screening will be read in full. During each read, the researcher will pull desired data and enter it in the spreadsheet.
5. Assess the quality of each study's methodology.	It is important to conduct a methodological assessment on each study in order to control for any bias that may arise during data interpretation. Each study will be rated according to a selected appraisal method provided by the reference librarian.
7. Analyze and interpret results.	The data analysis will be presented in the manuscript, including strengths and weaknesses of the studies, conclusions, and recommendations to address any identified needs.

The following will shed light on these issues by providing background, objectives, data sources, study eligibility criteria, previously studied participants, and recommendations from 14 former studies. First the methods and procedural rigor conducted is summarized followed by the results of these studies. Finally, a discussion follows to explain how researchers from various fields can improve their research on this topic to ultimately improve the lives of adolescent females in the United States.

Methods

In order to understand the various ways this topic has been studied, it was imperative to conduct a systematic review in coordination with PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. A search protocol was developed to include criteria, search terms, and data extraction procedures. An analysis of quality was also conducted to ensure all studies eligible were peer-reviewed in each respective academic journal.

The researcher also created a list of inclusion criteria to guide the screening process. These included:

- 1) Is it written in English?
- 2) Was the study conducted in the United States?
- 3) Was the study conducted on females?
- 4) Was the study conducted on middle school aged (adolescent) students?
- 5) Did the study focus on the effects of the media?
- 6) Did the study focus on body image?

Studies were excluded if they were not journal articles presented in peer reviewed publications. Examples of excluded publications included newspaper articles, books, and articles presented in academically focused magazines.

Sample Selection

All studies were retrieved through searches conducted between October 2013 and December 2014. The literate database, RefWorks, was utilized to code and screen articles during this same time period. Repeat searches were conducted throughout the process in the same databases to ensure no new studies were published that would have potentially fit the search criteria.

Abstracts from PsycINFO, Sociological Abstracts, Academic Search, Communication and Mass Media, Communication Abstracts, Medline, and Scopus were utilized. Gender Studies was also a database employed, but yielded no relevant studies.

The following search terms were utilized during the initial database search: adolescent, female, girls, body image, body perceptions, media, and history. An initial search in PsycINFO was conducted to ensure the quality of the search terminology. The search yielded over 100 articles and utilized the following terminology:

```
((SU.EXACT ("Body Dysmorphic Disorder") OR SU.EXACT ("Body Awareness") OR SU.EXACT.EXPLODE ("Body Image") OR SU.EXACT ("Body Image Disturbances")) OR ab (body NEAR/1 (image* OR aware*))) AND ((SU.EXACT("Advertising") OR SU.EXACT("Media Exposure") OR SU.EXACT("Popular Culture") OR SU.EXACT.EXPLODE("Mass Media") OR SU.EXACT.EXPLODE("Media Exposure")) OR ab(media OR television OR magazine* OR movie* OR film*)) AND ti(review)
```

Following the outlined search process, abstracts were screened to identify potential articles that fit the inclusion criteria. Abstracts that fit the criteria were then reviewed fully to ensure suitability. A record of exceeded papers (and reasons for exclusion) was maintained throughout the process. First, 948 articles were identified through database searching. Other outside sources were searched which yielded 153 articles. Between these articles there were 349 duplicates, which left 752 articles to be screened via abstract. To ease the screening of abstracts, an article was assigned a code labeled No1- No6 for exclusion. *No1* indicates studies discarded that were not in English, *No2* indicates studies discarded that were not conducted in the United States, and *No3* indicates studies discarded that were not conducted on females. , *No4* indicates Studies discarded that were not conducted with middle school aged children were recorded as *No4*. All articles that were coded No4 were excluded based on the mean age of participants in the study. Therefore, if the mean age of participants/respondents was not between 11 and 14 years of age, they were excluded. A code of *No5* indicates studies discarded that did not focus on the media, and *No6* indicates studies discarded that did not focus on body image.

This screening process left 231 articles to be screened full-text. Of these, 217 were excluded which left 14 articles for this review. Figure 2 outlines the process and outcomes of the search:

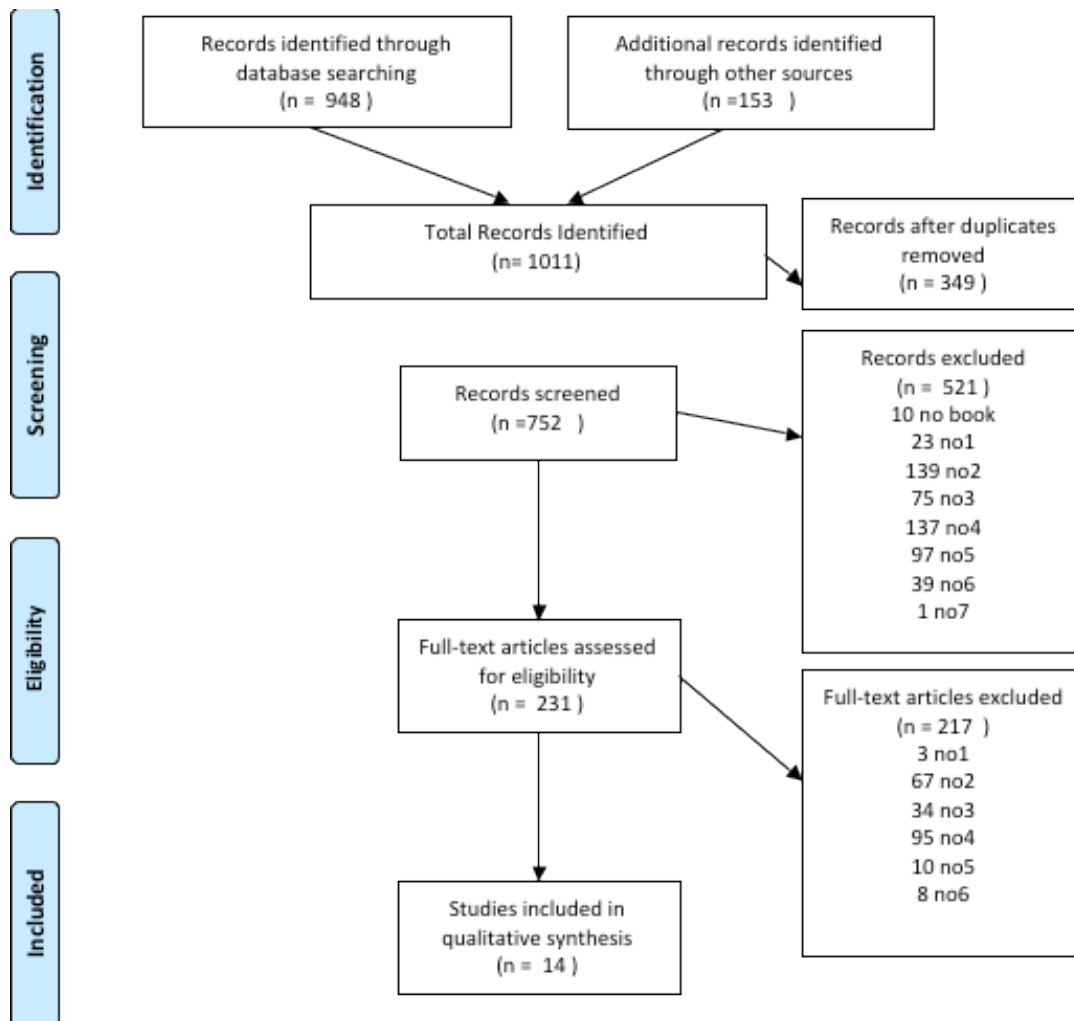


Figure 2. PRISMA Diagram Describing the Outlined Search.

Note. In the Prisma flow chart excluded articles were coded by “no#”. No1 indicates studies discarded that were not in English, No2 indicates studies discarded that were not conducted in the U.S., No3 indicates studies discarded that were not conducted on females, No4 indicates studies discarded that were not conducted with middle school aged children, No5 indicates studies discarded that did not focus on the media, and No6 indicates studies discarded that did not focus on body image.

Results

Overall, 13 studies published in 14 articles met the inclusion criteria. All articles were published over a 16-year period between 1998 and 2014.

Sample Characteristics

The populations surveyed ranged in size from 8 to 8,843. Many of the studies utilized specific grade populations as well as specific ethnic groups. Table 2 summarizes these findings.

Table 2

Characteristics of Samples from Articles in Systematic Literature Review

<i>Author (Year)</i>	<i>Sample Size</i>	<i>Mean Age/Age Range or Grade Level</i>	<i>Ethnic Breakdown</i>	<i>Location of Study</i>
Polce-Lynch et al., (2001)	75 ¹	5 th & 8 th grades	Caucasian=76%, African American =18%, Asian American =5.3% Hispanic =.5%	Large southeastern city ²
Oliver, (2001)	8	8 th grade	50 % 'light skinned' 50% ' dark skinned	Southeast United States
Duke, (2002)	8	12-14 years/grade	100% African American	Atlanta, Georgia; Savannah Georgia; Chicago, Illinois
Jung & Peterson, (2007)	21	M = 9.92 years	White = 81.3%, African American = 12.5%, Hispanic = 2.1%, other = 4.2% ³	Mid-Atlantic State
Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, (2014)	25 ⁴	M = 13.42	100% African American	Metropolitan area in the Southeast United States
Duke, L. (2000)	26	12-14 ⁵	10 white females; 16 African American females	Various locations throughout the United States
Jones, D. C., Vigfusdottir, T. H., & Lee, Y. (2004)	338	M= 12.6 ⁶ 7th-8 th grades	White = 71%, African American=2%, Asian=15% and Hispanic=4%	Metropolitan area of a major northwest city
Sherwood, & Neumark-Sztainer, (2001)	234	M = 10.6	None provided	Minnesota and Wisconsin

Table 2 Continued

Author (Year)	Sample Size	Mean Age/Age Range or Grade Level	Ethnic Breakdown	Location of Study
Taylor et al., (1998)	420	M = 12.8	38% Caucasian = 38%, African-American = 5%, Latina/Hispanic = 26%, American Indian = 1%, Other = 3%	Tucson, Arizona Santa Clara, California
Schooler, Kim, & Sorsoli, (2006)	454	M = 14.69	White= 64%, Latino/a= 19%, Black= 4%, Asian= 4%, bi- or multiracial= 9% ⁷	Northeastern United States
Van den Berg et al., (2007)	1386	M = 12.8	White = 48.3%, Black = 18.9% Hispanic = 5.8%, Asian = 19.6%, Native American = 3.6%, Mixed or Other Race = 3.8%	Minnesota
Taveras et al., (2004)	6545	M = 12.9	93.7% = White/non-Hispanic	All 50 states
Grabe & Hyde (2009)	195	M = 13.2	White= 89.%, American Indian/Alaskan Native = 2.8%; Asian American = 2.2%, Black = 1.7%, Hispanic = .6%	Wisconsin
Sinton, M. M., & Birch, L. L. (2006)	173	M= 11.34	Primarily non-Hispanic	Central Pennsylvania

*Note.*¹ 36 girls were in 5th grade; 39 girls were in 8th grade (12th grade girls were also sampled but were outside of the population of this study)

*Note.*² All girls attended a private, religious based school

*Note.*³ Study looked at girls and boys, ethnic breakdown for only girls was unavailable

*Note.*⁴ 25 dyads were interviewed (youth and their caretakers)

*Note.*⁵ Girls were interviewed at time 1 at ages 12-14 and time 2 at ages 17 -18

*Note.*⁶ Mean ages based on both genders studied

*Note.*⁷ Girls and boys were both studied. Ethnic breakdown for girls only was unavailable.

Study Type and Themes

The articles ranged in focus from athleticism and femininity to culture and sexuality. Since the scope of body image and media effect is so broad, this diversity of themes was expected. Table 3 outlines the scope and focus of each study:

Table 3

Themes of Systematically Reviewed Articles

	Number of Articles	Percentage
Disordered Eating	1	7%
Athletes / Athleticism	1	7%
Media Effect on Body Image (general)	6	43%
Body Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction	6	43%
Weight Concern	3	21%
Self- Esteem	2	14%
Thin Ideal	2	14%
Culture	2	14%
Sexuality	3	21%

Note. Multiple articles had more than one focus area.

Ten of the studies utilized quantitative methods and two studies qualitative methods. Study type, theme, and sample characteristics are displayed in

Table 4.

Table 4

Study Type, Theme, and Sample Characteristics of Systematically Reviewed Articles

Author (Year)	Sample Size	Mean Age/Age Range or Grade Level	Ethnic Breakdown	Type of Study	Article Focus	Measures Utilized
Polce-Lynch et al., (2001)	75 ¹	5 th & 8 th grades	Caucasian=76%, African American =18%, Asian American =5.3% Hispanic =.5%	Quantitative; Self-Reported Cross Sectional Survey	Body Satisfaction/ Dissatisfaction, Self-Esteem & Sexuality	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory; Media Influence Scale; Gender Harassment Questionnaire; Self Image for Young Adolc.
Oliver, (2001)	8	8 th grade	50 % 'light skinned' 50% ' dark skinned'	Qualitative; ethnographic case study	Media Effect on Body Image (general)	
Duke, (2002)	8	12-14 years/grade	100% African American	Qualitative; Interview	Media Effect on Body Image (general) & Thin-Ideal	
Jung & Peterson, (2007)	21	M = 9.92 years	White = 81.3%, African American = 12.5%, Hispanic = 2.1%, other = 4.2% ³	Quantitative; Self-Reported Survey	Media Effect on Body Image (general) & Body Satisfaction/ Dissatisfaction	Body Dissatisfaction; Figure Rating Scale for Children, BMI-based-Silhouette Matching Test
Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, (2014)	25 ⁴	M = 13.42	100% African American	Qualitative; Interview	Body Satisfaction/ Dissatisfaction	
Duke, L. (2000)	26	12-14 ⁵	10 white females; 16 African American females	Qualitative; Interview	Thin-Ideal & Culture	

Table 4 Continued

Author (Year)	Sample Size	Mean Age/Age Range or Grade Level	Ethnic Breakdown	Type of Study	Article Focus	Measures Utilized
Jones, D. C., Vigfusdottir, T. H., & Lee, Y. (2004)	338	M= 12.6 ⁶ 7th-8 th grades	White = 71%, African American=2%, Asian=15% and Hispanic=4%	Quantitative; Self-Reported Survey	Media Effect on Body Image (general)	Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire; Body Dissatisfaction; Eating Disorder Inventory
Sherwood, & Neumark-Sztainer, (2001)	234	M = 10.6	None provided	Quantitative; Self-Reported Cross Sectional Survey	Body Satisfaction/ Dissatisfaction, Weight Concern, & Dieting	Body Satisfaction/ Dissatisfaction; Weight Concern; Dieting
Taylor et al., (1998)	420	M = 12.8	38% Caucasian = 38%, African-American = 5%, Latina/Hispanic = 26%, American Indian = 1%, Other = 3%	Quantitative; Self-Reported Cross Sectional Survey	Disordered Eating & Weight Concern	Weight Concern Scale; BMI
Schooler, Kim, & Sorsoli, (2006)	454	M = 14.69	White= 64%, Latino/a= 19%, Black= 4%, Asian= 4%, bi- or multiracial= 9% ⁷	Quantitative; Self-Reported Survey	Media Effect on Body Image (general), Body Satisfaction/ Dissatisfaction, & Sexuality	Television Usage; Body Image Satisfaction; Self Esteem Scale; Sexual Experience; Perceived parental caring; character identification

Table 4 Continued

Author (Year)	Sample Size	Mean Age/Age Range or Grade Level	Ethnic Breakdown	Type of Study	Article Focus	Measures Utilized
van den Berg et al., (2007)	1386	M = 12.8	White = 48.3%, Black =18.9%, Hispanic =5.8%, Asian =19.6%, Native American = 3.6%, Mixed or Other Race = 3.8%	Quantitative; Self-Reported Survey	Weight Concern, & Dieting	Body Image Satisfaction; BMI; Magazine Usage; Weight importance; Weight Importance; Binge Eating; Self-Esteem; Depressive Symptoms;
Taveras et al., (2004)	6545	M = 12.9	93.7% = White/non-Hispanic	Quantitative; Self-Reported Cross Sectional Survey	Athleticism	McKnight Risk Factor Survey, Physical activity questionnaire developed by researchers, Racial/Ethnic Group, Weight control measures developed by researchers,

Table 4 Continued

Author (Year)	Sample Size	Mean Age/Age Range or Grade Level	Ethnic Breakdown	Type of Study	Article Focus	Measures Utilized
Grabe & Hyde (2009)	195	M = 13.2	White= 89.%, American Indian/Alaskan Native = 2.8%; Asian American = 2.2%, Black = 1.7%, Hispanic = .6%	Quantitative; Self-Reported Survey	Media Effect on Body Image (general) & sexuality	Self-surveillance; body esteem; current dieting status; depressive symptoms; math confidence; Music Television Usage
Sinton, M. M., & Birch, L. L. (2006)	173	M= 11.34	Primarily non-Hispanic	Quantitative; Self-Reported Survey	Body Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction	Body Esteem Scale, Children's Depression Inventory, Risk Factor Survey, Inventory of Peer Influence on Eating, Multidimensional Media influence Scale

Survey Measures

In the case of the ten quantitative studies, many forms of self-reported survey measures were utilized. These measures included but were not limited to, media usage, body satisfaction, body mass index (BMI), self-esteem scale, and attitudes toward appearance questionnaire, eating disordered inventory, weight concern scale, and self-image for young adolescences. In addition to these measures, the four qualitative studies utilized interview data.

Publishing Outlets

As stated, articles reviewed were published in peer-reviewed publications. The locations of publications are equally as diverse as the aforementioned study themes and are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Description of Publication Outlets of Systematically Reviewed Articles

Author (Year)	Publication Name	Subject Classification ¹	Description
Polce-Lynch et al., (2001)	Journal of Youth and Adolescence	Children and Youth; Psychology	Designed to enable psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, counselors, and educators to share ideas relevant to the subject of youth and adolescence.
Oliver, (2001)	Sport, Education and Society	Sports and Games; Education	Provides a focal point for the publication of research on pedagogy, policy and the wide range of associated social, cultural, political and ethical issues in physical activity and sport.
Duke, (2002)	Psychology & Marketing	Business and Economics; Psychology	Promotes an understanding of the nature and operation of psychological principles, as applied to strategies in the marketing industry.
Jung & Peterson, (2007)	Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal	Home Economics	Presents scholarly articles on a variety of issues and research in home economics. Focusing on current issues in child development, clothing and textiles, family economics, consumer studies, family relationships, food and nutrition, housing technology and teacher education.
Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, (2014)	Body Image	Psychology	Publishes high-quality, scientific articles on body image and human physical appearance.

Table 5 Continued

Author (Year)	Publication Name	Subject Classification ¹	Description
Duke, L. (2000)	Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly	Journalism Sociology	Focuses on research in journalism and mass communication including reports of original investigation, presenting the latest developments in theory and methodology of communication, international communication, journalism history, and social and legal problems.
Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, (2004)	Journal of Adolescent Research	Children and Youth; Psychology	Takes an interdisciplinary perspective in providing professionals and practitioners with current and relevant information on many aspects of individuals 10-20 years old.
Sherwood, & Neumark-Sztainer, (2001)	American Journal of Health Promotion	Nutrition and Dietetics; Physical Fitness and Hygiene	Covers the science and art of helping people change their lifestyle to move toward a state of optimal health.
Taylor et al., (1998)	International Journal of Eating Disorders	Nutrition and Dietetics; Psychology	Covers basic research, clinical and theoretical articles of scholarly substance on a variety of aspects of anorexia nervosa, bulimia, obesity and other atypical patterns of eating behavior and body weight regulation.
Schooler, Kim, & Sorsoli, (2006)	Sexuality Research & Social Policy	Sexual Behavior; Social Sciences, General	State-of-the-art empirical research on sexuality, theoretical and methodological discussions, and the implications of this evidence for policies across the globe regarding sexual health, sexuality education, and sexual rights in diverse communities.

Table 5 Continued

Author (Year)	Publication Name	Subject Classification ¹	Description
van den Berg et al., (2007)	Pediatrics	Medical Science	Presents abstracts of pertinent literature with commentary by leading experts in the field.
Taveras et al., (2004)	Journal of Adolescent Health	Children and Youth; Medical Science	Brings out new research findings in the field of adolescent medicine and health ranging from the basic biological and behavioral sciences to public health and policy.
Grabe, & Hyde (2009)	Journal of Applied Social Psychology	Psychology; Social Sciences	Includes content on laboratory and field research in areas such as health, race relations, discrimination, group processes, population growth, crowding, accelerated cultural change, violence, poverty, environmental stress, helping behavior, effects of the legal system on society and the individual, political participation and extremism.
Sinton, & Birch, (2006)	Journal of Youth and Adolescence	Children and Youth; Psychology	Designed to enable psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, counselors, and educators to share ideas relevant to the subject of youth and adolescence.

*Note.*¹ Information obtained through Texas A&M University Libraries

Types of Media

Nearly half of the articles reviewed the effects of the media and media images on the population in a generalized sense. Many articles framed their research question in terms of the “feminine ideal” or “media culture.” Rather than focusing on specific forms of media channels. Table 6 summarizes the media outlets mentioned and studied throughout the articles. Articles that mentioned multiple forms of media are reflected and distinguished here as well.

Table 6

Types of Media Studied in Systematically Reviewed Articles

	Number of Articles	Percentage
Television	2	17%
Movies	1	8%
Magazines	6	50%
Social Media	0	0%
Music Videos	2	17%
Advertisements	1	8%
Images (general)	5	42%

*Note.*¹ Multiple articles had more than one media type.

Theoretical Background of Studies

Providing theoretical background is essential to grounding social science research. 10 articles utilized a theoretical base for their research while four articles did not employ theoretical literature. Due to the diversity in scope of the research it is unsurprising that the theories utilized were equally diverse. Four articles also cited no theoretical perspectives or background for their studies. However, social

comparison theory (two articles), objectification theory (two articles), and social learning theory (three articles), were the most frequently cited. Cultivation theory, ecological systems theory, grounded theory, cognitive learning theory, and racial identity theory were cited in at least one article.

The Social Comparison Theory postulates that people evaluate themselves through comparisons with others. Therefore people will utilize these comparisons to construct various meanings in their social world. This is applicable to body image research as many individuals utilize comparison made between themselves and figures in the media to conceptualize their feelings about their bodies (Jung & Peterson, 2007; Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014).

Objectification Theory has argued that our culture is polluted with sexualized representations of women and therefore lead girls to treat and experience themselves as sexual objects. Additionally, according to this theory, women exposed to high levels of media with sexualized objects will begin to also internalize the perspective of women as objects as well as begin to view themselves as objects to be valued based on appearance (Grabe & Hyde, 2009).

Cultivation theory employs the idea that individuals use the consistent messages portrayed in the media, regardless of how narrow, to construct an image of reality. Therefore, according to the theory, constant contact with media channels will cause individuals to adopt a perspective that is consistent with the models seen in the media (Grabe & Hyde, 2009; Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014).

Ecological Systems theory suggests that individual characteristics have the strongest impact on development. However, this impact is followed by family and peer environments as well as cultural influences like the media (Sinton & Birch, 2006).

Social Learning theory posits that viewers will imitate the behaviors they see modeled in the media (Schooler, Kim & Sorsoli, 2006; Taveras et al., 2004). The term “modeling” is formulated in this theory in that it is believed that individuals learn their behavior and new skills from observing others (Taveras et al., 2004).

Finally, Racial Identity theory was utilized in order to position body image research in the context of culture. It was the concern of Duke (2002) that white youth had vastly different perspectives on body image and that little attention had been paid to how black females positioned themselves in terms of the intersections between their identity and their body image formation. The differences in the development of racial identity will therefore have a profound effect on the ways Black girls negotiate and possibly overlook media content (Duke, 2002)

Summary of Findings

The results from these studies yielded diverse results. The major findings, conclusions and limitations of each study are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7

Major Findings, Conclusions, and Limitations of Systematically Reviewed Articles

Author (Year)	Major Findings	Limitations	Author's Conclusions
Polce-Lynch et al., (2001)	Media messages were associated with body image, which in turn was negatively associated with self-esteem.	Study sample and the use of correlational data, which even with complex statistical techniques, cannot demonstrate causality.	Adolescents might benefit from being taught how to evaluate themselves in multidimensional ways (rather than on physical appearance alone), and learning how to deconstruct media messages both at home and in school.
Oliver, (2001)	Image is a very powerful source of information for the girls in this study. Particularly in making judgments about their self-worth.	Due to the nature of an ethnographic case study, results can only be generalized to the population at hand.	There is a need to help girls learn how to criticize texts and images supposable 'facts' about their bodies. Important for physical educators who hope to guide young people in the process of learning to live healthy lives because our culture bombards young people with body messages.

Table 7 Continued

Author (Year)	Major Findings	Limitations	Author's Conclusions
Duke, (2002)	African American girls felt White magazine models who were very thin or made up were not attractive and that diet products and cosmetics were not essential or even desirable for Black girls to look their best and exercised acts of anti-consumption when viewing magazines.	Informants' willingness to speak honestly about the topics as well as the non-probability purposive sampling method does not yield a representative sample and can limit the generalizability of findings.	Cultural relevance is important in promoting consumers' aspiration to mediated ideals.
Jung & Peterson, (2007)	Girls wish to be thinner than their perceived actual body size and responses indicated a greater proclivity toward beauty and looks.	Study participants might have been in different stages of puberty and development that could impact perceptual preferences and responses.	There is a need to address the development and maintenance of healthy body images among children since the definition of beauty and attractiveness may be both intrinsically and extrinsically defined and reinforced by both genders for both genders as early as 10 years of age.
Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, (2014)	African American adolescent girls in this sample were satisfied with their bodies but were divided in thoughts on media portrayals of women's bodies.	Recruitment practice may have affected the generalizability of results. Media consumption patterns or newer forms of media such as Internet/social media use were not obtained.	Media literacy may be an effective way of developing critical thinking skills and promoting positive body image among early adolescent girls.

Table 7 Continued

Author (Year)	Major Findings	Limitations	Author's Conclusions
Duke, L. (2000)	Girls claimed to be impervious to mediated images in the magazines but did see the effect images have on their peers. Most white girls were satisfied with their looks but were less satisfied with their body shape and weight and realized that obtaining the thin ideal is difficult if not impossible. Black girls do not particularly admire or seek to emulate models but instead, pointed to the more infrequent images of African-American athletes and affluent individuals to build their fantasies.	Although it is believed that most of the girls who read the magazines regularly come from families with moderate discretionary income, there may be a large number of girls from less affluent families who also read them.	The range of beauty embraced by the Black community may serve as a dynamic model for how the dominant culture can progress in redefining femininity for the good of all women.
Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, (2004)	Females were more engaged with appearance magazines, reported more appearance conversations, endorsed greater internalization of appearance ideals, and were more dissatisfied with their bodies.	Appearance magazines did not contribute to the prediction of either internalization or body image among the boys. This outcome could have reflected the mildly skewed distribution among the boys related to the lower levels of appearance magazine exposure. No limitations were noted in regards to the female population.	Greater attention should be given to helping adolescents understand the ways in which their appearance conversations serve to create and reinforce standards of beauty that can augment the internalization of appearance ideals and undermine body image satisfaction.

Table 7 Continued

Author (Year)	Major Findings	Limitations	Author's Conclusions
Sherwood, & Neumark-Sztainer, (2001)	High levels of awareness of the media's influence were reported, with over 75% of the girls reporting that they think advertisements influenced people's thoughts and behaviors. Comparisons between dieters and non-dieters showed that dieters were more likely to perceive themselves as overweight.	Generalizing these results to other populations of girls given that Girl Scouts aren't a representative sample. Emphasis in Girl Scouts on self-esteem suggests that these data may underestimate levels of weight concern and body dissatisfaction in girls this age.	These findings suggest that early adolescence maybe a good time to intervene with girls for eating disorder prevention and health promotion.
Taylor et al., (1998)	Although peer culture had a greater impact on body dissatisfaction, youth in middle school group did aim to look like characters in television shows, which impacted their body image satisfaction.	Cross-sectional data represent associations between variables and not causation.	Some prevention programs include components that help students develop skills for weight regulation however, do not teach body acceptance. This is a key component to allowing youth to accept their bodies.
Schooler, Kim, & Sorsoli, (2006)	The adolescents in our sample who more frequently watched and talked about television with their parents reported higher self-esteem, greater body satisfaction (among girls), and less sexual experience.	Data relies entirely on adolescents' reports of their own television use and their parents' behaviors. Therefore, the study could only speak only to adolescents' <i>perceptions</i> of parental mediation.	The importance of parents clearly extends beyond that of censors who limit access or exposure. Parent conversations are an important intervening factor when it comes to processing images viewed on television.

Table 7 Continued

Author (Year)	Major Findings	Limitations	Author's Conclusions
van den Berg et al., (2007)	Girls who reported magazine reading had between 1.6 and 2.0 times the odds of engaging in unhealthy weight-control behaviors, compared with nonreaders of magazine articles about dieting or weight loss. The results indicate that frequency of magazine reading does, in fact, predict later weight-control behaviors in female adolescents.	Limitations of the study include the use of a single item to assess magazine article reading, providing no information regarding the types of magazines read or frequency of magazine reading during the 5-year study period.	The results of the current study, when combined with this literature, highlight the importance of media in influencing adolescent girls' physical and emotional health and suggest a need for interventions to moderate this effect.
Taveras et al., (2004)	The association between wanting to look like figures in the media and physical activity to be slightly greater among girls and boys with BMI exceeding the 85th percentile compared with those below the 85th percentile.	Other limitations of this study are the cross-sectional design and self-reported physical activity and anthropometric measures, which may be biased toward greater reported hours of activity, lower body weight, and taller stature. Also, the subjects in this study come from all 50 states and several U.S. territories, but generalizability may be limited because the subjects are children of registered nurses and the cohort is more than 90% white.	Wanting to look like figures in the media was associated with higher physical activity levels among older children and adolescents, independent of other personal and social influences. These data suggest that television, movie, and magazine industries should be encouraged to cultivate and reinforce realistic and healthy norms of physical activity and body image.

Table 7 Continued

Author (Year)	Major Findings	Limitations	Author's Conclusions
Grabe, & Hyde (2009)	The direct relation between media consumption and negative psychological outcomes could be explained, in part, by levels of self-objectification. One explanation of these processes is that girls' exposure to the televised sexual objectification of women cultivates a particular view of the self, a view that emphasizes the importance of physical appearance. It is possible that after viewing a media genre that is replete with images of hypersexualized and objectified female bodies, girls begin to view themselves as objects whose value is based on appearance.	In addition, although hypersexualized images of Black women, pervade the music industry, our study sample did not allow for investigation into the role of race or ethnicity. While past research has shown that body mass index (BMI) is related to variables included in the current study this data was not collected in this study.	Findings suggest that music television plays an important role in socializing adolescent girls and creates potentially harmful consequences. Therefore, it is a vital task for future research is to uncover ways to shift the culturally sanctioned view of the female body to promote the positive well-being of women.
Sinton, & Birch, (2006)	Adolescent girls report a heightened level of body dissatisfaction. The expected associations between girls' weight status, depression, and parental, sibling, peer, and media constructs and girls' level of body dissatisfaction were present.	Such analyses is best conducted with longitudinal data therefore the ability to generalize our findings was limited due to the nature of the sample, which was comprised of primarily non-Hispanic white girls.	Awareness of media messages heightens appearance schemas may aid in better understanding the role of the media in the development of body dissatisfaction. It may be that the media exerts an influence on body dissatisfaction within individuals with high levels of appearance schemas.

Discussion

Effects of Media on Body Image Related Issues

These studies suggest that the media has an impactful effect on adolescent females. These effects can be seen in a generalized sense in more general terms of body dissatisfaction, weight concerns, self-esteem, and the thin ideals projected in the media. Girls in multiple studies experienced body image dissatisfaction (Grabe, & Hyde, 2009; June & Peterson, 2007, Sinton & Birch, 2006; Jones, Vigfusdottir & Lee, 2004; Taylor et al., 1998), lower self-esteem and self-worth (Polce-Lynch et al., 2001; Oliver, 2001), and weight concerns (Sherwood, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2001; Van den Breg, 2007), which affected various many of their lives. Girls in particular were found to be highly susceptible to the effects of the media as well as body dissatisfaction (Polce-Lynch et al., 2001).

Media consumption has led to all of these various aspects of body image related issues. These issues were most strongly witnessed in the females that were more engaged with appearance related characters, magazines, and advertisements (Taylor et al., 1998; Jones et al, 2004; Jung & Petterson, 2007). Females were found to be more engaged and placed greater worth on the various figures in the media. This type of value judgment led girls to have a greater internalization of appearance ideals and be more dissatisfied with their bodies and led girls to have more appearance related conversations, which perpetuated their body dissatisfaction (Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004).

These societal standards contribute the notion of appearance schemas—a concept that is widely discussed in body image evaluation research (Sinton & Birch, 2006). The term “appearance schemas” arises from the understanding of the cogitative component of the human body and how it is generalized in our society by ingraining the *importance* of appearance in young people’s thought processes. Therefore, the presence of appearance schemas can contribute to body dissatisfaction by increasing the focus and importance of physical appearances (Sinton & Birch, 2006).

The current study also linked BMI to the internalization of body dissatisfaction. Those with heavier body weights and larger shapes were more likely to be dissatisfied and more likely to strive to achieve the thin ideal. These findings are confirmed by Jung and Peterson (2007), who found that when reading fashion magazines, females most remembered products and advertisements from these magazines and most preferred viewing famous actors/actresses in magazines. This exposure was also directly related to girls who viewed themselves as 3 BMI units larger than their actual BMI and also had a desire to be thinner in order to achieve the thin ideal represented in the media.

To contrast these findings, a study by Grabe and Hyde (2009) found that viewing MTV music videos did not directly impact depression, self-objectification, or anxiety. However, the author still established that a greater consumption of music television was positively related to self-objectification among adolescent

girls. This effect in turn negatively impacted the esteem adolescent girls derived from their bodies, dieting patterns, and negative psychological wellbeing.

As stated, girls who classified as “normal weight” still strove to achieve a thinner figure to represent those seen in the media (Jung & Petterson, 2007; Taylor et al., 1998). The associations made between media figures also affected the amount of physical activity performed. According to Taveras et al. (2004), as the frequency of media usage rose so did the appeal to look like figures in the media, which caused greater—and often unhealthy amounts of physical activity. This association also became stronger as the girls grew older. Additionally, those who were in the 85th percentile in the BMI index were more likely to exercise at higher frequencies in order to achieve their preferred weight.

Overall these studies confirm that media can adversely affect body image constructions. There were also several mediating factors discussed throughout the reviewed studies.

Mediating the Effects of Body Image Related Issues

Schooler, Kim and Sorsoli (2006) found that youth who watched television with their parents and were engaged in media literacy and body satisfaction conversations with their parents were more likely to have higher self-esteem, greater body satisfaction, and less sexual experience.

A study on African American youth showed that conversation with maternal caregivers was also positive mediator to negative feelings about their bodies. Although youth in this study noted that they were at times unsatisfied with

their bodies, the youths' experiences with their caregivers was able to help the girls understand body image in a context that was largely centered on acceptance due to the positive conversations regarding their bodies and appearance. Additionally, youth who did have negative discourses with their caregivers about their bodies realized that their negative conversations were from a place of playfulness or concern about their health and therefore were still able to maintain positive feelings about their bodies (Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014).

Along the same lines, African American culture proved to be a strong mediating factor in the consumption of magazines. African American girls in this study read magazines on a regular basis however; they often felt the content was unrelated to them because they did not see their values in the magazines. For example, youth felt the family and friend aspects of teen culture were largely ignored and that the content simply focused on beauty. When youth did consume material related to beauty, youth also felt that this form of mainstream media ignored the products and tastes that were suitable for their culture. These attitudes were carried over when youth revealed the ways in which they consumed these magazines. The abovementioned criticisms of this form of media proved to only be at the surface for these girls as youth also showed they only viewed the magazines as a precursor to expression of anti-consumption attitudes and simply read the magazines to criticize their components. Since it is known that media critics worry that teen magazines present girls with a false sense of reality and unrealistic ideals, the ways in which the youth in this study consumed and analyzed the texts may

lead to new avenues of inquiry. This is important as culture in this case proved to be a mediating factor to the risk behaviors often associated with the consumption of media. It is important to note that the overwhelming discourse in the magazines largely feature the white, feminine ideal. Which is also a contributing factor in the girls' anticonsumption attitudes (i.e. the girls did not feel represented in the magazines). The authors even advocate for more culturally comprehensive materials to mitigate these effects. However, Duke (2000) noted that the "resistant interpretations of White-oriented material in fashion and beauty magazines make sense in light of research that has shown African-American girls have higher levels of self-esteem and more positive body images than White girls (p. 383)."

Therefore, the ways in which the girls strongly held to their identities and culture while reading these magazines acts as a possible model for consumption of all media types since youth had a realistic perception of how their culture was portrayed in real life contexts (Duke, 2002).

Jones et al (2004) found that peer experiences were also highly relevant when examining the maintenance of body image satisfaction as appearance criticism from peers proved to be an important aspect of the internalization of the thin ideal and body image satisfaction. Girls in this study also displayed greater involvement in discussions with peers about their appearance and utilized these conversations to construct their body satisfaction. In many cases, these conversations cultivated a culture between peers where girls highly prioritized their appearance, which led many youth to be dissatisfied with their bodies (Pope,

Corona, & Belgrave, 2014). This dynamic goes hand in hand with that displayed by Sinton and Birch (2006) who found that youth reported heightened levels of body dissatisfaction when utilizing high levels of appearance schemas, thus confirming that peers—who have a high influence on the development of appearance schemas—are a relevant variable to mediate media image or hinder positive body image formations.

These examples show that youth were able to maintain constructions of positive body image due to the sociocultural factors mentioned in the abovementioned studies. The factors that emerged in this review included parental involvement, culture, and peers. Research shows that there are of course, other sociocultural factors that contribute to positive body image (Sinton & Birch, 2006). However, these factors as whole were not discussed throughout the reviewed studies but were noted as areas for further research (Jones et al., 2004; Jung & Peterson, 2007; Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014). This is likely due to the fact that sociocultural factors were not within the scope of this systematic review since media effect was the main concentration. Nevertheless, the abovementioned factors are utilized in the following section in order to being to postulate future research avenues as well as inform practitioners on possible intervention opportunities.

Strengths and Limitations

14 articles were found that met the inclusion criteria for this review. The search terms utilized included all possible subcategories of body image and the media. This resulted in a wide range of studies from a variety of journals and

yielded a heterogeneous sample. This is beneficial for those researching body image because it paints a picture of the wide-array of disciplines conducting body image research and promotes a need for greater interdisciplinary research.

Nevertheless, the amount of articles the search yielded was somewhat disappointing as there were many articles that were disregarded due to the fact that they did not study middle school populations or females. The fact that only the mean age of the participants was considered is also a likely contributor to this effect. There was also a great deal of studies conducted in other countries, which was irrelevant for this study's purpose.

The author served as the sole screener and coder for data collection and analysis. This serves as a limitation due to the fact that multiple coders often provide reliable results. The searching time period October 2013- December 2014 also serves as a limitation as relevant studies may have been released since this time.

Conclusions

Overall body image and the media have been researched at great length. This study reveals that the focus of this research over time has been very specified in various areas and utilized multiple theoretical perspectives. These studies all note the impactful effect media outlets have on adolescent females. Multiple types of media as well as multiple outcomes have been explored throughout this review. It was the aim of this study to identify future areas of research as well as offer recommendations for future practice. This was necessary in order to drive quality

and cohesive research and subsequent interventions across various disciplines in order to continue to shed light on the multiple issues related to body image constructions.

Overall, it is necessary for youth to limit their consumption of mass media in order to prevent the known health risks associated with media exposure (Taveras et al., 2004). This is especially relevant when it is known that youth often base their identity and self-worth on their appearance schemas. These constructions of body image can change during this phase of adolescence, which also makes understanding these effects highly relevant as this is a time period when physical changes are witnessed in girls (Sinton & Birch, 2006).

It is also known that culturally based gender images that are communicated through television, movies, and advertisements are correlated to the way these adolescents evaluated their physical appearances and their overall body image. This suggests that adolescents might benefit from being taught how to evaluate themselves in multidimensional ways (Polce-Lynch et al., 2001; Oliver, 2010). Therefore interventions as well as future research are necessary to continue to understand these intricacies.

Practice Implications

Overall, all of the studies review called for interventions that will aid youth in cultivating proper coping mechanisms to navigate their media infested world. As a whole it has been found appropriate to address the development and maintenance of healthy body images among this age group in relation to media (Jung &

Peterson, 2007). These recommendations varied and were respective to each article's focus.

Nevertheless, the most often recommended prevention programs included those focused largely on media literacy. This is with the ultimate goal of determining how mass media can be a positive influence in the lives of youth (Jones et al., 2004). Additionally, more specific articles noted that prevention programs that emphasize the promotion of girl's talents and abilities beyond appearance might help promote healthy constructions of body image (Sinton & Birch, 2006). It is also noted that if these types of preventions take place the reduction of risky sexual behaviors as well as disordered eating could decrease (Schooler, Kim & Sorsoli, 2006).

It is equally necessary for youth to be encouraged to participate in youth programs that highlight the functionality of the body. Sporting activities are an example of this, as they not only promote physical activity but also allow youth to utilize and view their bodies in a multitude of ways (Grabe & Hyde, 2009).

On a larger scale it is recommended that mass media industries could act transform media into a pervasive influencer for promoting public health by promoting physical activity, healthy living, and healthy bodies. This however, is only possible if media outlets develop and reinforce realistic norms of body image (Taveras et al., 2004).

Sinton & Birch (2006) noted the timing of the interventions as an equally important factor in addition to the content and strategy. It is suggested that

appearance schemas may stabilize by late adolescence and therefore interventions should take place in early adolescence in order to begin to teach these coping skills before negative body formations emerge. Overall, these interventions can reduce the chance of girls basing their self-concept only on external sources and only on their appearance, thereby reducing body dissatisfaction as a whole.

Research Implications

Overall this study also provided a valuable perspective on body image research. As a whole it is necessary for future studies to expand on upon this research to assess the underlying mechanisms that may play a role in the development and maintenance of adolescent girls' positive body feelings. This however cannot be done without theoretical foundations. Therefore it is recommended that future research have stronghold in social science theory in order to effectively drive and position the research findings in reliable format.

The fact that there was little discussion involved around the mediating factors between negative body image construction and media consumption also indicates that researchers should continue to study the sociocultural factors that influence body image construction. It is known that the media is a pervasive influence however this study found that peers and family can also negate negative messages (Schooler, Kim & Sorsoli, 2006; Jones et al, 2004).

Furthermore, when observing the populations analyzed in these 14 studies, it is clear that there is a need for diversifying the populations studied. Moreover, culturally relevant studies may also shed light on the various ways in which body

image is constructed in different communities and across various races (Duke, 2000). Therefore, the results of this study show that there is a greater need for a coordinated plan in terms of studying multiple populations and cultures (Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014; Duke, 2000).

The number of articles discarded due to the fact that they did not study middle school aged children is also a research concern as it is known that this time period is one of special consideration when it comes to the formation of body image. Therefore, continued research on this age group is necessary to contribute to the findings on body image constructions and aid in the development of proper interventions for years to come.

CHAPTER III
CONCEPTUALIZING BODY IMAGE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
ADOLESCENT FEMALES: A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

Introduction

Body image has been widely studied and has been shown to effect humans in a myriad of ways. Humans' outward appearances as well as their internal experiences related to the body have psychosocial influences that reach far beyond an objective or social "reality" of appearance (Cash, 2004). The most widely used definition of body image is "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears to ourselves" (Nabi & Oliver, 2009; p. 395). However, body image is not static and research has made clear that there are multiple aspects to consider when conducting body image research. This is largely attributed to the fact that individuals and their subjective experiences of what their bodies look like have been found to be more physiologically powerful than the visual reality. Therefore, one's body related self-perception, self-attitude, and overall thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviors toward their body and health should be considered throughout body image research (Cash, 2004, p. 1).

Women especially have a turbulent relationship with their bodies given that throughout history the womanly body has been in the public eye and a source of judgment and ridicule (Woodruffe-Burton, & Ireland, 2012). From a cultural perspective, the historical and philosophical dualism between the mind and body

has formulated a place where women are constantly objectified and debilitated in innumerable of aspects of society. This relationship is explored further in the in order to contextualize the importance of understanding culture and how it effects women's interpretations of their bodies. It is also important to understand the current landscape of research regarding women and their bodies.

Beginning in 1985, Cash & Henry (1995) conducted a national survey of women's body image and consistently found that women have grown to be increasingly dissatisfied with their bodies over the previous decades. This research was considered a hallmark for body image research as it began to transition the study of body image into the social sciences. This was important as nearly all works in the early 20th century had been conducted by neurologists (Cash & Smolak, 2011) Nearly half of the in this study women reported negative evaluations of their appearance and a preoccupation with being or becoming overweight (Cash & Henry, 1995). Wilson Latner and Hayashi, (2013) confirms as women reported increasingly negative evaluations of their appearance and increased preoccupation with their weight from the 1980s to the early and mid-1990s.

Studies have also steadily shown that women perceive themselves as heavier than they would prefer (Bair, Steele & Mills, 2014) and adolescents have begun to adopt the same type of discontentment at early ages (Smolak, 2004). Although children are often aware of what it means to be healthy, it is widely recognized that concepts of physical attractiveness are culturally determined, thus confirming the need to consider multidimensional aspects of body image (Smolak,

2004; Sands & Wardle, 2003). Furthermore, there is considerable consensus that sociocultural factors are key to understanding the development of body image. For example, in Western society this determination is often driven by the idea of thinness and is perpetuated to youth from a young age which greatly influences the way adolescent females feel about their own bodies (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Sands & Wardle, 2003). Various studies have shown that ethnicity and culture are factors to consider when analyzing the internalization of body image and the comparisons that contribute to these internal processes (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Strahan et al., 2008).

To gain a historical perspective, Bucchianeri et al., (2013) conducted a ten-year longitudinal study which showed that many children and adolescents reported concern over their body shape and cited risk behaviors such as extreme dieting and eating disorders as methods to maintain a certain weight. Results also indicated that the diverse group of male and female participants became progressively more dissatisfied with their bodies over the 10-year period—especially during the time between middle school and high school (Bucchianeri et al., 2013). Kinsaul, Curtin, Bazzini and Martz (2014) further confirm that when sociocultural norms perpetuate a thin ideal for women, disordered eating increases as well.

One factor limiting young people's participation in healthy activities and limiting healthy behaviors is body dissatisfaction, also known as poor body image. Poor body image is considered a leisure constraint for young girls because it has been found to deter girls and young women from participating in physical leisure

activities—which also continues to perpetuate health concerns for adolescent girls (James, 2000; Racine, DeBate, Gabriel, & High, 2011). Furthermore, Stice and Shaw (2002) confirmed the association of body dissatisfaction with eating pathology finding that body dissatisfaction is considered a predictor of eating behaviors. These types of eating behaviors will often indicate bulimic symptoms and serves as one of the core diagnostic components for eating disorder diagnoses.

Therefore, it is important to uncover these contributing variables (Smolak, 2004) when examining changes in body image dissatisfaction among the younger age groups. This is also necessary in order to gain a clear picture of the unique trajectories of female adolescent's body dissatisfaction, which has been studied very little on a microlevel (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Identification of awareness and internalization of the thin ideal as central components in the development of body dissatisfaction highlight potential preventative, intervention targets, but it remains necessary to utilize research to obtain a deeper understanding of how adolescent females process images in the media and how it continues to relate to body image dissatisfaction and overall health (Cash, 2004).

Factors such as family, friends, and mass media greatly influence young women in terms of their body image. The damaging effects of poor body image can be seen in the forms of eating disorders, lowered self- esteem, and decreased enjoyment in every-day activities (Liechty, Freeman & Zabriskie, 2006). Stice & Shaw (2012) found body dissatisfaction to be an important factor in the onset of eating disorders and therefore confirm that poor body image is a dangerous and

potentially debilitating psychological occurrence in all aspects of young people's lives.

Nevertheless, not all body image formations are associated with negative factors. Theory, research, and practice have focused on furthering the understandings and prevention methods in order to treat poor body image and body dissatisfaction. While these directions are necessary, the approach is somewhat unbalanced as there are a great deal of youth with positive body image. Historically, it was believed that the lack of negative body image resulted in positive body image. However, this has been proven untrue as women with positive body image are often highly optimistic, have social support, adaptive coping skills, and weight stability (Tylka, 2011). Additionally, Frisén and Holmqvist (2012) found that spirituality, inner positivity and broad definitions of beauty were themes associated with positive body image formations.

It is also notable to understand the various individual and cultural differences various groups experience in regards to body image as various ethnic groups report and respond to body image concerns differently. Parker et al. (1995) examined body image ideals and dieting behaviors among African American and White adolescent females. African American females were found to be more flexible than their White counterparts in their concepts of beauty and spoke about self-acceptance while many White adolescent females expressed dissatisfaction with their body shape and were found to be rigid in their concepts of beauty. This further confirms the complexity and varying dynamics of body image formation in

adolescents. However, this may be attributed to the fact that many African American females celebrate a larger body ideal and often have heavier body weights that are effects by cultural and socioeconomic factors (Cash & Smolak, 2011). African American girls have been found to continually have less of a drive for thinness and greater body satisfaction. This however, does not mean that African American women are not subject to thin ideal internalizations due to the media as women who viewed highly sexualized rap videos reported a more negative body image after viewing.

Studies have also shown that the cultural values of African American populations have increased pressures on youth to be “thick” and reject Westernized standards. However, some youth have been known to want to reject their African American cultural standards and embrace a thinner physique. This has not always been accepted in African American culture and has caused youth to become stigmatized between both sets of idealisms. This stigmatization can often result in eating disorders. However, this also presents potential problems as eating disorders have been traditional viewed as a “white girl problem” and therefore efforts to inhibit these behaviors in this population are limited (Counihan, & Van Esterik, 2013).

Nevertheless, African American women often do choose to reject comparisons that idealize Western standards. These comparisons are often made between women they see in the media because they do not believe they are a true representation of their culture and bodies. This was also the case when viewing

images of African American females in the media because females believe they were often still exhibiting characteristics of white ideals rather than culturally appropriate characteristics (Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014).

As stated, African Americans females have been traditionally more accepting of their bodies and experience body disaffection much less than other populations. This type of body satisfaction in African American girls may also be attributed to the fact that peer and familiar influences overreach the effects of other sociocultural factors (Cash & Smolak, 2011).

Hispanic populations also have distinct characteristics that shape body image constructions. This is largely attributed to the fact that mainstream values, in the culture may be at odds with the values individuals receive from their own cultures and communities. Overall, Hispanic communities may be more accepting of a larger body type and have been found to be more satisfied with their own body sizes than Caucasians.

However, this statement is not without a caveat as one study found that more than 60% of Hispanic girls engaged in unhealthy weight loss behaviors. These behaviors included restrained eating and skipping meals. Research suggests that these practices are not uncommon in Hispanic culture and are motivated by health-related concerns. This is unsurprising when it becomes known that Hispanics are at increased risk of being overweight and of developing serious health conditions such as diabetes and coronary disease (Schooler & Lowry, 2011)

The acculturation process for many Hispanic families may also contribute

to body dissatisfaction. The process of learning a new culture has potential for many stressors such as language use, learning new cultural norms, and possible discrimination. Additionally, cultural norms presented in the media may skew the perceptions of healthy and desirable bodies to someone unfamiliar with media literacy practices. These difficulties may inspire responses such as body dissatisfaction because certain populations are eager to incorporate their lives into a new culture. (Schooler & Lowry, 2011)

However, these cultural norms are not subject to effect just ethnic populations as mass media has been shown to have a harboring effect on many individuals and throughout many populations.

Media Ideals and Body Image

Although many of the abovementioned sociocultural factors contribute to body image constructions, society most often perpetuates unrealistic ideals of women through mass media channels. This issue has grown in popularity for research in the last 25 years, as the media has been harshly criticized for spreading and even creating unrealistic cultural standards for women and adolescents (Strahan et al., 2008). For example, a 2003 study showed that although only 5% of American women are underweight, 30% of female characteristics are portrayed as underweight in popular television shows. This overrepresentation of thin women sends the message that “thin is in.” Furthermore, the fact that heavier characters are depicted in a negative manner further exuberates the body dissatisfaction process (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). North American culture also plays a role in the

development of body image as physical attractiveness is highly valued. Due to this, women put a great deal of time, energy, and money into pursuing appearance goals to meet these standards. Evidence also suggests that these consequences may be especially harmful to women, who tend to experience greater body dissatisfaction and who have often come to expect that they will be judged more harshly on their appearance than men (Buote et al., 2011).

It is arguable that these pressures are equally as present in young females as adolescents grew up in the first decade of the new millennium and came of age during the “digital revolution,” a time of vast and speedy technological development. During this time, television, movies, radio, and magazines became increasingly accessible and readily available to young people. The traditional or older media (television, movies, radio, and magazines) were all fundamentally changing in the face of the swift adoption of newer digital media such as social networking sites and music and video sharing on the Internet, MP3 players, and mobile phones and therefore transformed the manner in which young people received information (Brown, & Bobkowski, 2011).

While beauty ideals can be transmitted in many ways to young people, the mass media represents the most powerful and persuasive sociocultural transmitter (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). A 2005 school-based study found that 69% of preadolescent and adolescent females were unhappy with their bodies and attributed this discontent to the influence of fashion magazines (Field et al., 2005). Digital media also has effect as Bell, Lawton, and Dittmar (2007) found that

adolescent females exposed to thin models in music videos show a significantly larger increase in body dissatisfaction from pre- to post-exposure in comparison to females who had listened to the songs without visual accompaniments.

Furthermore, television has proven to act as a pervasive transmitter. Tiggemann & Pickering (1996) found that although the amount of television watched by adolescent females did not correlate with either body dissatisfaction or drive for thinness, category of program did. Specifically, the amount of time spent watching soap operas, movies, and (negatively) sport predicted body dissatisfaction, and the watching of music videos predicted drive for thinness. Although media is not the focus of the study at hand, it is still important to recognize the effects the media can have on young people.

Theoretical Considerations

The Social Comparison Theory (SCT) has been utilized to understand how young people formulate their body image. This theory presents the psychological aspects that are imperative to deepen the understanding of these issues. The SCT assumes that people frequently evaluate their opinions and abilities. In the absence of an objective basis for comparison, this need to evaluate is naturally satisfied by comparisons.

SCT is focused on individual processes rather than group dynamics. This is unlike many social science theories, which focus on group processes. Framing the theory around the premise of an individual's processes, social comparisons are said to occur because humans are naturally driven to self-evaluate and collect

information about the world around them. In other words, humans are intrinsically driven to know about their social environment. This is often conducted internally via self-evaluation that is recognized as a “normative phenomenon yielding information important to survival in and adaptation to one’s environment” (Warren, 2006, p. 2). Humans conduct this self-evaluation by comparing themselves to others based on various dimensions. For example, an individual may compare to another based on appearance, attitudes, or abilities.

These processes are based on the assumption *that humans want to have a firm understanding of what they can and cannot do*. First, it is known that the social processes arise when the evaluation of opinions or abilities is not feasible by testing directly in the environment. Second, under such circumstances people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to others. Third, these comparisons lead to pressures based on uniformity. This is based on the social dynamic that people believe they must match one another in the dimension at hand. Forth, there is a tendency to stop comparing oneself to those who conflict—especially if one conflicts the comparison dimension in question. Fifth, factors such as importance, relevance, and attraction to a group, will affect the strength of the pressure toward uniformity. This can affect the strength of the original motivation for comparison.

The process in which this occurs has also been summarized in three steps: acquisition of social comparison information, thinking about the information in relation to the self, and reacting to the information (Wood, 1996).

However, these processes do not occur at once as Festinger hypothesized “that when a person is uncertain about a specific attribute, he or she will clarify his or her standing by examining the attribute with regard to objective sources of information or against direct physical standards” (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 126).

Current research categorizes the comparison process in two ways: *upward* and *downward*. *Downward comparison* is when an individual compares oneself to someone “worse off” in a particular dimension of interest. This type of comparison is believed to enhance subjective wellbeing and self-perception, whereas *upward comparisons*, when an individual compares oneself to someone who is “better off” on the dimension of interest, are believed to decrease wellbeing (Morrison Kalin, & Morrison, 2004).

These processes are not always clear, as opinions and abilities can be interchangeable in this theory. This often complicates the human processes that take place when comparing oneself to another subject. Nevertheless, there is a drive for self-evaluation. In order for these comparison processes to function properly, humans need to know their own capacities and limitations and they must be accurate in their opinions of objects and of other people (Warren, 2006).

More specifically, the majority of body image research is driven by these assumptions (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). Perceptions of relative standing can influence many outcomes, including a person’s self-concept, level of aspiration, and feelings of wellbeing. While all of these outcomes are internal and subjective, the comparison process is a core element of human conduct and the human experience

(Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002).

This is especially notable for body image research as the SCT also suggests that when people compare themselves to an individual whom they want to look like, enacting an upward comparison, their overall self-regard and well-being decrease (Lin & Kulik, 2002) and body dissatisfaction increases (Tiggemann & Slater, 2004). This dissatisfaction has been attributed to the internalization of body image—a central component in the development of body dissatisfaction (Sands & Wardle, 2003; Cash, 2004).

Furthermore, an individual's relationship to the comparison target is vital to understanding these processes. Unsought comparisons often occur which means that individuals may exercise comparison processes between themselves and someone *dissimilar*. In the context of body image, this often occurs when comparing physical appearance and eating habits (Morrison Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). In addition to unsought comparisons, individuals are also inclined to choose inappropriate comparison targets. Choosing inappropriate targets such as celebrities, leads certain individuals to be more vulnerable than others in terms of the pressures that accompany trying to achieve ideal beauty standards. For example, if the comparison is in regards to an individual's body image, he or she may be affected if the information is ambiguous or not in keeping with societal standards (Thompson et al. 1999).

Along the same lines, mass marketed and distant targets such as figures in the media are thought to reduce greater pressure to conform to idealistic standards

of attractiveness than targets that are tangible in daily life such as friends and family (Morrison Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). In one study, individuals with eating disorders significantly overestimated their size when exposed to photographs of women in popular fashion magazines. However, when not exposed to photos individuals in the study were able to accurately depict their body size (Shaw & Waller, 1995). Heinberg and Thompson (1992) also found that females who considered mass marketed targets such as celebrities, actresses, and models as an important comparison group, were more likely to engage in unhealthy weight control practices such as vomiting and disordered eating than those who did not see these universal targets as important. Years later, Bair, Steele and Mills (2014) confirmed that woman's personal body ideals are shaped by the perceived norms of their peers as women in the study selected a thinner personal body ideal in conditions where they believed their peers had done the same. This effect was also seen when the norm appeared to be a heavier body construction.

Related to youth populations, the social comparison processes often occurs during adolescence. Since adolescence is a challenge transition phase, these comparisons and internalizations are often utilized as a natural means for gathering information about the social world. Since this age group finds the development of personal and social identities a necessity, these processes occur often (Krayner, Ingledew & Iphofen, 2008). Comparisons are frequently made between adolescent females and models portrayed in popular media and advertising (Grab & Hyde, 2006). This dynamic becomes a highly relevant risk factor because comparisons

can put adolescent females at risk for low body satisfaction and eating disorders when conducted a high levels (Strahan et al., 2008).

The SCT serves as the theoretical basis for this study. Therefore, it is imperative to keep these processes in mind throughout this study as these will provide valuable insight into the underlying physiological processes that occur in the formulation of body image.

Methodology

This study aimed to identify how adolescent females conceptualized body image in regards to individual, family, and community characteristics. To date various methods have been developed and introduced to measure the concept of body image. When determining an appropriate approach to answering the research question, the researcher utilized qualitative strategies, which were needed to formulate a deeper understanding of this multidimensional concept. More specifically, Photovoice, which is inspired by youth voice and community based participatory research, was utilized in order to provide deep insight to the day-to-day lives of participants. This approach was appropriate when seeking to understand how adolescent females construct their body image since Photovoice is known for its ability to “facilitate youth-adult partnerships in which each group may gain insights into each other’s worlds from which they are ordinarily insulated.” (Wang, 2008, pg. 157).

Photovoice is a type of action research that allows people to identify, represent, and enhance their community through photographic technique (taking

and talking about photos) and allows research participants to illustrate or document topics and issues they face on a day-to-day basis (Wang & Burris 1997; Berg & Lune, 2004). The enhancement of community well-being is a primary aim for Photovoice methodologies as it offers an ideal method for young people to bring voice to individuals or populations who are traditionally silenced. The photos and discourse that is generated through these methods are utilized to raise community awareness regarding public policy change, human rights. Additionally, these methods have been known to break down stigma and stereotypes held by various populations (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004). Innovative Photovoice projects grounded in youth participation and youth culture have been initiated around the country and the world (Wang, 2008) and have the potential to effectively bring to light important information regarding the youths' perspective on a public health concerns as well as the issues that affect their daily lives (Brazg et al., 2011 & Yang, 2008).

The utilization of Photovoice with youth populations has significant benefits as it is a tool that can be easily adapted to a variety of scenarios and has the ability to serve as a mechanism for personal and community change for marginalized and underserved communities (Royce, Parra-Medina, & Messias, 2006; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004). Research has shown this research facilitates youth-adult partnerships so that both groups gain insights into each other's worlds (Wang, 2008). For example, the act of sharing and discussing photos and issues facing communities through the eyes of youth enables youth and adults

alike to jointly construct a different and dynamic view of their community (Vaughn, 2013). Youth participants have also noted greater capacities and confidence after Photovoice research has been conducted in their communities, which proves the act of participation alone is liberating as youth regardless of the outcome, have a psychologically empowering experience (Vaughn, 2013). Youth involved in Photovoice have also displayed the ability to exercise autonomy and express their creativity to a new audience. This effect allows youth to “advocate their concerns using their language and experiences” which shows that Photovoice projects are concurrently meaningful for communities, adults, and youth (Wang, 2008).

Depictions of Self

As an extension of these traditional Photovoice methods, youth were instructed during the photograph training session to only photograph themselves—i.e. take selfies, in order to conceptualize their body image. This is appropriate for this study as selfies are seen as self-reflexive and self-representation narrative strategy (Schleser, 2014). Today, when one takes a selfie, he or she portrays a form of reflection that can now be controlled by the photographer proving that although the phenomenon of taking self-portraits is not new, the motivations and reasons behind the practice has changed (Warfield, 2014). Additionally, many believe that this exercise is highly motivated by participation on social media sites. This is substantial as the way one presents themselves on social media outlets is yet another mode of expression (Fausing, 2013) and proves that selfies are seen as a

way to gain control over how an individual's presents oneself through a self-portrait.

The elicitation of selfies was imperative to the concept of understanding how youth not only present themselves at face value but also aimed to remove the barrier between the researcher and the subject—especially in relation to the topic of body image formation. This method attempts to do this by stepping through the image and into the image making process in order to allow youth to partake in the discourse that surrounds the world on the backside of the image (Fausing, 2013).

Sample Selection

Youth participants were initially recruited from Bryan Independent School District and the Wixon Valley 4-H Club due to the researchers previous relationship with the youth from past projects associated with her role as a youth development worker in the community. Participants were recruited with the assistance of adult leaders at each location as well as through personal acquaintances. In both of these cases, those whom were contacted initially recruited agreed to participation. This recruitment led to 15 total participants. In order to gain more diversity in the sample, additional youth were recruited at the Lincoln Recreation Center. Approximately 15 information sheets went home to parents after an initial introduction from the researcher. Four of the 15 agreed to participate.

Sample Characteristics

15 adolescent females from these entities within the Brazos County were purposefully sampled in order to provide valuable, diverse information regarding body image within the same community. A purposeful sample was chosen for several reasons: 1) the Photovoice process take a significant amount of time, 2) analysis of pictures and narratives also take a significant amount of time, and 3) the sensitive topic will limit the number of participants willing to be involved in the project.

Since there is a large majority of Hispanic youth enrolled at Bryan Independent School District, a large number of white youth enrolled in the Wixon Valley 4-H Club, and a large proportion of African American youth who attend the Lincoln Recreation Center, these sites can provide a unique perspective in regards to the various intersections these youth may experience. To be considered for the study, youth had to reside in Brazos County, attend one of the three above listed entities, and be female between the ages of 11 and 14 years old.

The data for this study were collected from girls between the ages of 11-14. The mean age of the adolescents was 13 years old. The age breakdown of youth is summarized in Table 8.

Table 8

Sample Demographics by Site Location

Site Location	Number of Youth (N)	Mean Age
Wixon Valley 4-H Club	5	13.2
Bryan ISD	6	13.5
Lincoln Recreation Center	4	12
Total	15	13

The ethnic breakdown was 46.6% White (N=7), 26.6% Latin/Hispanic (N=4), and 33.3% African American/Black (N=5). It is also notable to highlight that the sample included two sets of identical twins from both the Wixon Valley 4-H Club and the Lincoln Recreation Center. Additionally, one set of twins also had a younger sister in the sample. This information is summarized in Table 9.

Table 9

Sample Demographics by Individual

#	Youth	Age	Race	Site Location
1	Holly ¹	13	White	Wixon Valley 4-H Club
2	Kate	14	White	
3	Anna ¹	13	White	
4	Julie	13	White	
5	Avery	13	White	
6	Annabelle	14	Latin/Hispanic	Bryan Independent School District
7	Yvie	13	White	
8	Paula	13	Latin/Hispanic	
9	Callie	13	White	
10	Isabelle	14	African American & Latin Hispanic	
11	Grace	14	Latin/Hispanic	Lincoln Recreation Center
12	Aaliyah	11	African American	
13	Kelsey ^{2 3}	13	African American	
14	Kim ^{2 3}	13	African American	
15	Layla ³	11	African American	

Note¹: Participants are sisters and identical twins.

Note²: Participants are sisters and identical twins.

Note³: Participants are sisters.

Data Collection Procedures

Aside from preliminary sessions, the researcher met with participants twice for data collection purposes. Multiple phases of data collection were utilized: introduction and semi-structured interviews, sharing circles, and project reflection, and community outreach. These phases are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10

<i>Photovoice Collection Methods</i>		
Phase	Type of Data Collection	Description of Process
1	Introduction and Semi-Structured Interviews	The first session was utilized in order to obtain demographic and media usage information, conduct initial semi-structured interviews with each participant regarding their perceptions on body image, and conduct the photo training session. Following this session, youth had 10 days to take their selfies before the sharing circles in Phase Two.
2	Sharing Circles and Project Reflection	The second session was utilized for youth to view, discuss, and process their photos in “sharing circles.”
3	Community Outreach	A third session is to be held for youth to display photos and findings to community members and stakeholders. This phase is also crucial to fulfilling the elements of community-based research and is scheduled for a later date.

Interview questions were designed with the social comparison theory in mind. Questions like “What type of media influences you most,” “How do these images influence how you feel about your body,” and “How do you compare yourself to these images.” gave the researcher a foundation for inquiry.

Sharing circles were appropriate in the second phase because youth were able to divulge their insecurities and emotional turmoil associated with their body image concerns in a group of like-minded peers. The concept of sharing circles was inspired by previously conducted research about indigenous populations (Lavallee, 2009). This concept was first created in order to bring forward worldviews that can bridge western practices and the knowledge of indigenous populations. The sharing circles allow participants to capture people’s experiences and are comparable to focus groups. However, the sharing circles are utilized as not only an information-

sharing venue but as a platform to formulate knowledge and include healing (Lavallee, 2009).

Community outreach was also an important phase of Photovoice as it is inspired by youth voice and community participatory research. The relationship between youth and communities is integral to this research because when youth are organized within a community, positive and meaningful change for both can occur (Delgado, 2015). This is impactful because both bodies of literature have also found that youth participation in communities yields healthy behaviors and positive outcomes for not only the youth involved but the communities as a whole (Barnett, & Kumaran, 2012).

In the context of this study, youth participation is considered a “process of involving young people in institutions and decisions that affect their lives” (Checkoway, 2011; p. 341). Here, youth can provide insight to issues that relate to social justice and disparate youth populations (Delgado 2015; Wang, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative that scholars engage youth in the community development process after the research is complete. This concept is highly pertinent to the study at hand because youth are, of course, considered experts of their own lives regarding body image (Shea, 2012). This also lends itself to many ethical considerations (Appendix I).

Data Analysis

Interviews and sharing circles were analyzed thematically utilizing the constant comparative method while guided by the interpretations of the

participants. This approach allows the researcher to gain the trust of the participants and generate theoretical ideas that support and inform the research question (Glaser, 1965). In a study such as this, it is important to constantly reevaluate the data utilizing this method in order to ensure that rich data is produced (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). Through this process, data from interview transcripts were coded into themes. This process was carried out by reading each of the transcripts and assigning a thematic code to paragraphs, phrases, and sections. New data and codes were compared with not only data from individuals but with those from all three sites and across all coding categories. Over 40 categories emerged through this process.

Additionally, the photographs were analyzed using Collier's (1986) indirect and direct analysis. This type of analysis is valuable when evaluating visual data as the information communicated without languages is often, if not more, powerful than verbiage from the aforementioned interview transcripts. The indirect analysis takes place when the youth participants utilize the photos to aid them in the storytelling process while direct analysis allows the researcher to employ an open viewing of the photographs. In this case, youth selected certain photographs to enrich their storytelling process when answering questions about body image formation during the sharing circles. Additionally, the researcher organized and compared the images to detected themes and codes. The researcher's role was also considered when collecting data. This is outlined in Appendix I.

Building Quality into the Study

Various verification strategies were utilized to ensure trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness is comprised of four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. This concept coincides with generalizability, in quantitative studies. In this study credibility is comparable to internal validity and is achieved when the researcher analyses the data in a reflexive process in order to judge the meanings and relevance of developing themes throughout the study. This was achieved here through constant reflexivity in order to ensure that the themes accurately depicted the experience of the participants. Credibility was also achieved by allowing participants to give feedback on their semi-structured interview transcripts--also known as member checking. In relation to external validity in quantitative research, transferability was achieved in this study by obtaining a purposeful sample from multiple and diverse sites. The sample chosen aimed to allow the reader to make a connection between this data and other contexts. Dependability, known as reliability in quantitative research, was achieved in this study by establishing an audit trail of all coded data. Finally, conformability was achieved by conducting peer-debriefings with faculty members. Peer debriefing is also known as analytic triangulation and is achieved when disinterested peers are engaged in data interpretation process. Here, this was accomplished by soliciting feedback from two faculty members from the coded data, in order to ensure the thematic analysis was understandable and well interpreted (Creswell, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Findings

This study aimed to identify how adolescent females conceptualized body image in regards to individual, family, and community characteristics. Data were collected from 15 semi-structured interviews, three sharing circles, and 219 photographs. The girls represented youth from various facets within a singular community.

It was clear that the youth at the Wixon Valley 4-H Club were all close friends. Holly and Anna were also twin sisters, which also presented a unique relationship to the group. The girls all like to participate in their 4-H projects and activities and all plays sports at school. Many of the girls mentioned playing basketball, volleyball, and having pets. The twins, Holly and Anna, were the most athletically built in the group and spoke often of sporting activities at school and at home with family. All five girls except for Avery attend the same public school in the College Station community. Avery attends a Christian school in Bryan. Additionally, all youth spoke of their siblings except Avery, who is an only child. Kate is the only 8th grader in the group and was often talkative and made jokes throughout all of our interview sessions. This was sharply contrasted with her friend Julie who is smart and talks often about school projects and grades. All youth were from upper-middle class households and have college educated parents. The parents of the youth were also closely connected due to their involvement in 4-H projects.

These types of friendships were seen with the group from Bryan ISD as well. All of the girls except for Annabelle and Grace attend a public middle school in Bryan and are all best friends. These girls clearly spent a great deal of time together and have very similar interests. These interests include music, sports, and simply spending time together laughing. Isabelle, a biracial 8th grader, is closest with Callie, another 8th grader. Both of these girls talk often on the phone and ride home together after school. Isabelle is very tall and has an almost “lanky” body shape while Callie contrasts this with a fuller figure. Callie, easily the curviest girl in the group, has olive skin with beautiful freckles on her cheeks. Yvie, and Paula are also in 8th grade and also like to join in on the jokes and fun with the other girls. Yvie has long blond hair that the girls often covet and play with. Yvie also has strict, traditional middle class parents. Paula has multiple siblings and traditional Mexican-American parents. Paula’s parents do not believe girls should live away from home until they are married but do encourage her older female siblings to work and be independent. All four of these girls are from upper middle class families and spoke often of their parents and siblings. Annabelle and Grace are also best friends who attend a public high school in Bryan. They are both daughters of English as a second language parents. These girls are easily the closest with their Hispanic culture and spoke to me often using Spanish words intermixed with English. Although their English is very good, they often did this as a joke to me, the “gringa.” I believe this was also a way of teaching me about their culture as they always translated their words and told me about their culture and families.

Both of these girls are from lower-middle class households. Although both households have two parents, they both spoke of their fathers working two jobs and/or long hours during certain times to make ends meet.

Similarly, the girls from the Lincoln Recreation Center were also friends as they saw each other multiple times each week at the Center. Kelsey and Kim are also identical twin sisters who both enjoy basketball and hanging out with their other sister, Layla. Kelsey and Kim live with their hardworking mother and Layla's father, in addition to another younger sibling. Their mother was a clear influence in the girls' lives as all three girls spoke often of respecting and representing their families and mother. All three girls were excitable, vivacious, and were always inquisitive about the project and the progress I was making. It was clear they wanted everything to go well and wanted to see their commitment to the project through. Layla was most excited about her upcoming birthday and talked a lot about her friends at school and the Lincoln Center. Aaliyah, the quietest girl in the group, was always shy but spoke a lot about the activities she did with her brother, mom and dad, such as riding bikes on the weekends. The girls all attend public school and from lower- middle/lower class families.

The following results offer discourse regarding how young people conceptualize body image in regards to various sociocultural factors. The diverse facets of these girls' lives as described above aid to support previous research that upholds body image as a multidimensional concept. Here, overall representations of body image are outlined in order to give baseline data on how these young

people construct and define body image. These representations are characterized by individual, family, and community characteristics and circumstances and were of course, influenced by the abovementioned factors.

Based on the thematic analysis these three themes were divided into 12 subthemes that highlight the various aspects participants used to construct body image. The following sections will outline these characteristics and circumstances.

Individual characteristics include appearance related ideals, health, internal narratives, religion, and race/ethnicity. *Family characteristics* include negative and positive family narratives, and pets. *Community characteristics* include church, female and male counterpart narratives, extra-curricular activities.

Individual Characteristics and Circumstances

As stated, youth were empowered to construct their own meanings of body image. Initially, most youth were unable to construct a definition of body image on their own and most participants stated they were unsure what body image meant or did not have a full understanding of how to explain this abstract concept. The researcher however, gave an operational definition of body image for participants to consider when thinking about body image issues and taking their photographs. This definition was, “the mental picture you have of your body plus your thoughts and feelings about this picture.”

It is important to note that all youth interviewed reported feeling satisfied with their bodies in some capacity and were encouraged to formulate their own understandings of body image and to consider their daily lives when taking photos and talking about their experiences. Photovoice methodologies also greatly aided participants in displaying their constructions of body image. These constructions were at times broad as participants utilized ideals related to appearance, happiness, beauty, health, and weight when constructing their definition of body image.

Here individual characteristics include, appearance related characteristics, health, internal narratives, religion, and race/ethnicity.

Appearance Related Characteristics

Many of the girls associated beauty in their constructions of body image. Youth varied on a spectrum between acceptance of all body types and more ridged definitions of beauty. When asked about the ideal body Annabelle, from Bryan ISD said, “well I like my body because I really don’t care what other people say,” while Yvie agreed, “I like it [my body] because it’s my body and no one else has it.”

Participants continually utilized the term “pretty” and cited “feeling pretty” as reasoning for taking many of their photographs. Yvie explained this when referencing Figure 3, “I don’t know why I took this, I just feel pretty in it.”

This type of narrative is in keeping with the broad definitions of body image mentioned above, as youth could not always pinpoint why they liked a particular photo of themselves.



Figure 3. Yvie’s Selfie in her Room

In keeping with this, Paula referenced Figure 4 and pointed out one where she was not wearing her glasses, “I’m just more happy because I look prettier.”

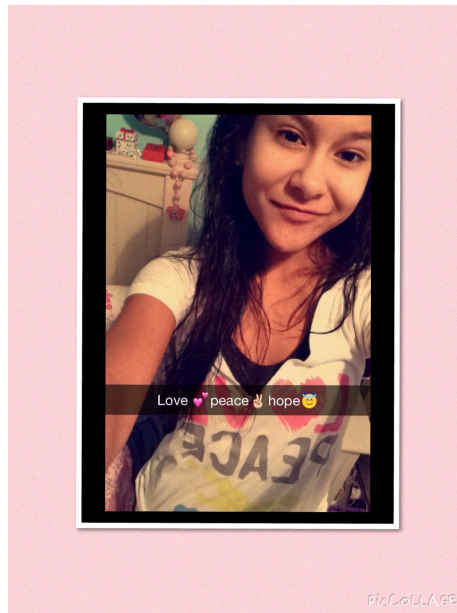


Figure 4. Paula Without Her Glasses

Many of the submitted photos were selfies that showed the girls and their facial features—i.e. a “traditional” selfie. Photos like those represented in Figure 5 embodied many of the youth’s ideas of being pretty, “These photos make me happy, and it makes me realize I look pretty.”

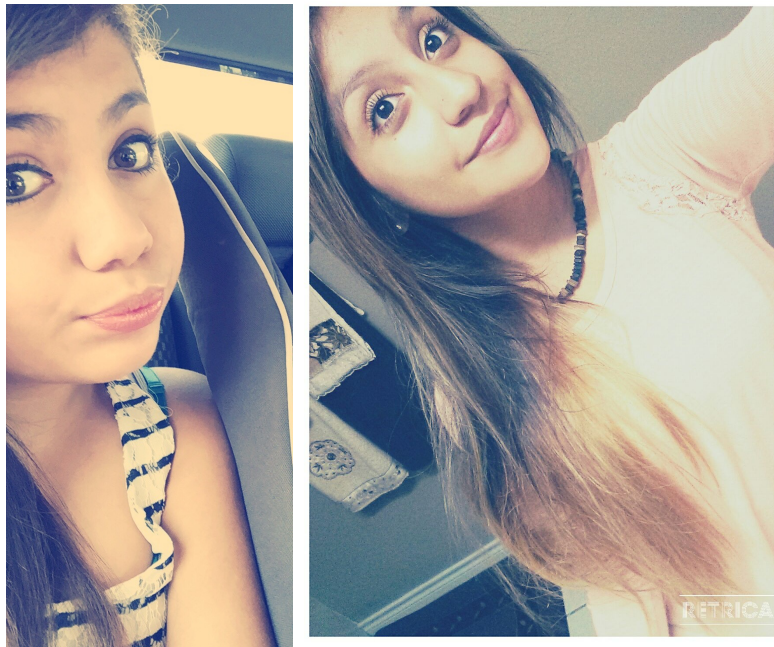


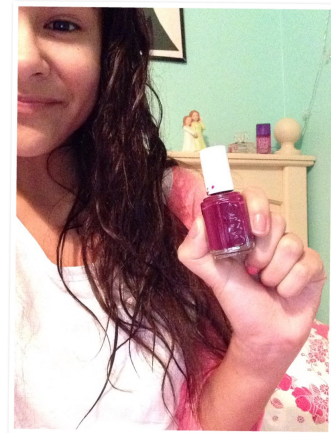
Figure 5. Girls In “Traditional” Selfies

Overall, the idea of being “pretty”, and feeling beautiful was an overlaid topic anytime appearance related issues were discussed. However, participants did note that various aspects of their appearance such as make up, skin care, hair, style and clothing, and socks and shoes were especially important.

Make Up

Participants took several photos related to make up and often discussed the idea that makeup aided them in achieving certain beauty ideals. Yvie said, “its like art on your face. It covers stuff that you don’t want to be in pictures.”

Certain types of makeup, like those in Figure 6, including mascara and nail polish were cited at length. Annabelle said, “I just like to make my eyes pop,” and “it’s just like so fun to paint. It’s like art on your fingers. Those things make me feel beautiful so I feel good about myself.”



PicCOLLAGE

Figure 6. Grace and Paula with Their Makeup

Skin

In relation to makeup, while participants often cited it as a form of entertainment or something extra to enhance their beauty, some noted that it also aided them in achieving flawless skin. Complexion and ensuring their skin was free of blemishes was also a topic of importance to the youth in relation to beauty. Grace, pictured with make-up above said, “I don’t usually wear foundation but when I have a pimple I gotta take care of that.” Isabelle agreed, “Yeah, it covers up your blemishes.”

Others noted that blemish free skin was preferred and often ideal in terms of beauty. Julie, who has freckles and red hair, had been previously criticized for her freckles noted that she rejected the use of makeup because of her complexion and discussed how she had “body image issues” when it came to her skin’s composition, “My freckles sometimes, like some girls are starting to wear makeup and I’m not into that because I would look weird with make up on my freckles.”

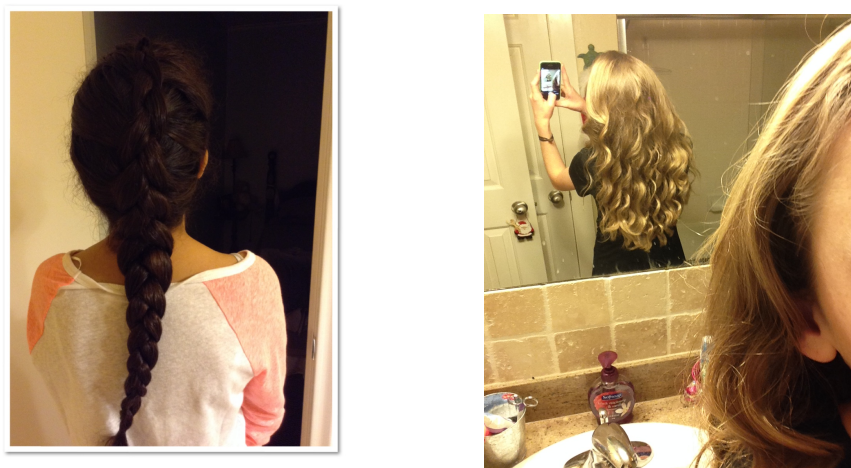
Overall, participants did not feel they needed to have make up, but were equally appreciative of the benefits it provided to their appearance. In this case, participants utilized the use of makeup in many ways as they not only wished to fulfill beauty standards but also viewed make up as an extra addition to their appearance. This was only the case with certain girls, as many youth—like those at the Lincoln Center—did not mention the use of make-up.

Hair

Youth spoke about their hair in a similar capacity. Yvie, who was often subject to many hair related complements from the others said, “I mean you have hair so you should flaunt it. It just adds to your beautifulness.”

Participants submitted many photos, like those seen in Figure 7, where their hair and tools to fix their hair was the focus. Tools such as straighteners and curling irons were photographed in addition to photos of braided, long, and curled hair. Participants often equated their hair being fixed with their overall representation of beauty and success. Yvie exclaimed during one point during the hair discussion, “I mean how am I supposed to get my life together if I can’t get my hair together?”

Participants also cited doing hair and fixing each other’s hair as a form of entertainment, “I like doing hair too because it just keeps me entertained.”



PicCollAGE

Figure 7. Paula and Yvie Showing off Their Hair

Unlike make up, participants had more ridged definitions of what “good” hair looked like. Many participants noted that long hair or braided hair was preferred, but did not feel it was the most important part of their lives or daily regimen. Nevertheless, much like that of makeup, hair proved to be a solid outlet for expression. Although youth noted they didn’t have to always have their hair “perfect” or “fixed” they enjoyed this aspect of their appearance and utilized it to not only enhance their appearance but also as a form of entertainment and a way to bond with friends.

Style and Clothing

Another dominant topic was that of clothing and having fashion sense. Many girls noted that older girls at school and stars on YouTube often inspired their clothing choices. Kate explained, “I don’t compare myself to them because they are way older but I do get ideas on what to wear.”

Many youth noted that feeling thin and pretty in their clothing was most desirable. For some, others at school inspired them to dress up. Julie said, “You try to dress more fashionable if other girls are dressing more fashionable,” while Yvie contrasted, “A lot of people say that you’re dressing to impress someone else but I like to do it for myself.”

Nevertheless, getting dressed up was a common theme as youth frequently noted events they attended where they were able to get dressed up and try different outfits, like those on Yvie in Figure 8, “I like to pair clothes together to see what looks good on me.”



Figure 8. Yvie Trying On Different Outfits

Additionally, youth often cited feeling thin as a motivation for their various clothing choices. Grace said, “I like these because I’m dressed up. It makes me feel pretty whenever I wear these type of clothes, it makes me feel skinny,” while Avery mentioned, “I don’t pay attention that much but sometimes certain clothes make me look fat because they’re too big.”

Socks and Shoes

One aspect of clothing that was frequently discussed and photographed was that of socks and shoes. To the youth, different shoes represented their identity, interests, and overall outlook on life. Youth noted that fun socks and bright shoes

represented their playful side while comfortable, non-flashy shoes represented their need to be laid back and comfortable.

Julie commented on Figure 9 and said, "I love being comfortable I don't care where I'm going. I just love 'jandals' because they are comfortable I wear them with everything. I wear them with socks that are in season Christmas, Valentine's, etc."



Figure 9. Julie With Her Jandals

Kelsey expressed these feelings about her socks, “Like me and my socks. I love my socks cause it’s Marvel. It shows a side of me.”



Figure 10. Kelsey Wearing Her Marvel Socks

Participants also submitted several photos of the shoes they wear when participating in sporting activities. These shoes were not only functional but added a fashionable aspect to physical activity. Anna referenced Figure 11, “these shoes are my favorite because they are pretty when I’m running I look down I see blue and orange and it makes me feel like I’m running fast.”



Figure 11. Anna's Blue and Orange Tennis Shoes

Kim echoed these ideas stated, “In the mornings for basketball practice everyone would wear their basketball socks. Like the girls were always prepared with their clothes and stuff so I wanted to be like that.”

Examples such as these leads to the idea that socks and shoes are a salient form of expression for participants. Although they referenced different contexts, they continually felt their shoes represented their identity or mood in a certain way.

All in all, youth experienced various thoughts and ideas when constructing their definition of body image. Beauty and appearance were recurring themes that echoed through various aspects in the girl's lives. Although some chose to get dressed up and worry about their appearance in order to feel pretty and good about themselves, others worried about what their skin, clothes, and overall looks

portrayed to onlookers and their friends. In some instances, youth utilized beauty enhancements such as makeup to empower themselves and feel good about their looks while others were influenced by peers at school and older girls they viewed on the Internet. Nevertheless, it is clear that various aspects of beauty and appearance have a strong presence in adolescent females' lives.

Health

Appearance was of course, not the only theme that emerged. Participants spoke of the importance of health when discussing body image. Many participants cited that weight status wasn't as important as health status when asked about the ideal body type. Annabelle described this effect, "Fit and healthy, because it's good for your health verses weight so you can live longer."

The most common themes regarding health were related to diet and exercise. Many girls spoke about the importance of being active and the negative impact of unhealthy foods. Girls also discussed how a balance of healthy food was equally as important in terms of dieting behaviors.

Exercise

To the girls, exercising not only represented an extracurricular activity but a way to be healthy, "I like to work out because whenever I work out I feel good after I don't feel bad about my body and I feel strong," said Anna. Avery added, "when you're play sports you feel good, you feel better about yourself because you're fit."

The girls cited gymnastics, basketball, and volleyball as some of the activities they utilized to stay healthy and active. Figure 12 represents a few of the many photo submissions also centered on this topic:

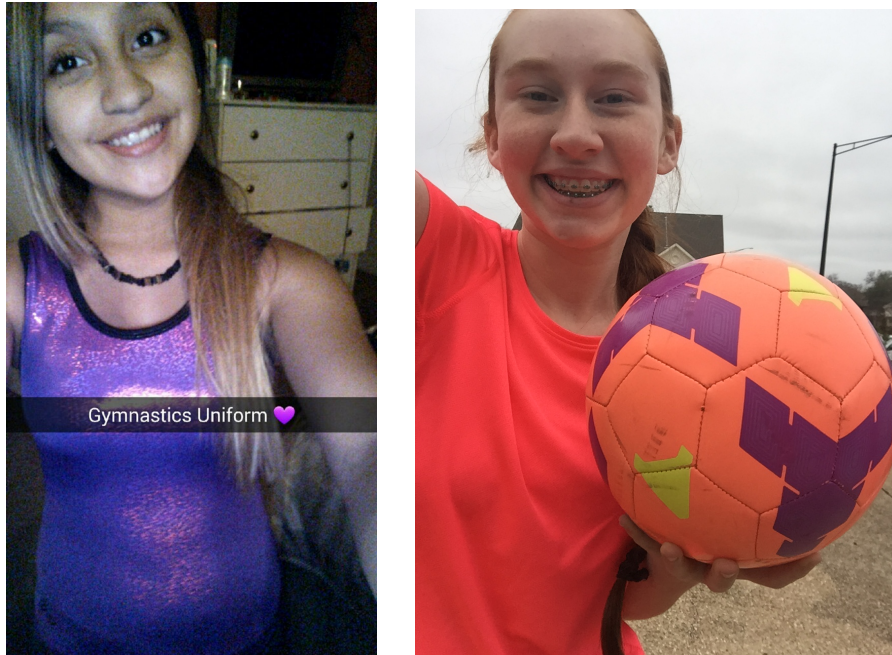


Figure 12. Girls Working Out

Many youth equated working out with being thin. Anna said, “If you’re not fit and active you’ll get fat and lazy,” while Aaliyah added “I have to run around the house at least 10 times in the morning because I worry about what I weigh.”

Other girls saw being active as an outlet for bonding with family and friends. Julie spoke of this, “Because I like to play volleyball when I’m on the court I just like feel good we all get together and cheer.”

The balance between being fit in order to be health and being fit in order to be thin was more difficult for some than others. Aaliyah described how her motivations for being active were two-fold, “Every Saturday or Sunday we ride our bikes together as a family. It’s working out, like I have to be skinny. I don’t want to be fat when I grow up! And I get to spend time with my family.”

Overall, youth were very aware that their physical activity level effected many facets of their lives including their weight and health. Although most youth attributed their participation in physical activities to the fact that they enjoyed being active and to health related reasons, they also exhibited a firm understanding of the fact that their activity levels also affected their weight status.

Diet

This same understanding was observed throughout the discussions about diet. Many youth spoke about the importance of eating right as well as finding the balance between eating healthy and unhealthy foods.

Many photographed and discussed going out to eat and visiting restaurants, “I took this one [Figure 13] when I was going to go eat. I was going to my favorite restaurant,” Avery discussed in-depth her reasons for submitting the following photo, “This one shows that I really like burger. I really love hamburgers. I realized that cup says Texas on it and I’m from Texas and I eat burgers so it was perfect.”



Figure 13. Avery After Visiting Texas Burger

Anna spoke about the importance of eating at home in order to maintain a healthy diet, “When you go out to eat you make bad choices like you choose fried over grilled and they have big portion sizes.” Aaliyah added, “I love to eat salads. Like every time when we go home. I love to eat salads.”



Figure 14. Anna with Tray of Broccoli

Although youth appeared to have a firm understanding of health related concepts such as eating right and exercising, a small portion of youth did speak about diet restrictions and skipping meals. Callie, who expressed the most dissatisfaction with her body in the group said, “I can’t eat anything fattening, most of the time I don’t eat breakfast.” Aaliyah said, “If I’m eating the wrong thing, “I’ll tell myself ‘I shouldn’t be eating this.’ So I can be healthy and be skinny.”

Nevertheless, many spoke about the important balance between eating healthy and allowing food that was perceived as “not good.” Paula referenced Figure 15 and said, “I like food and sweet stuff. Even though like they say we have to eat healthy, I don’t care. I can eat my sweet stuff and still be fit.” This idea was repeated by Grace who said, “I know how to control it. Eat right, get on the runner, and be active.

This contrast is important to note as youth at times, struggle with healthy eating practices and are likely bombarded with message about weight loss and diet restrictions. Still, the overall tone of this theme was related to healthy practices.

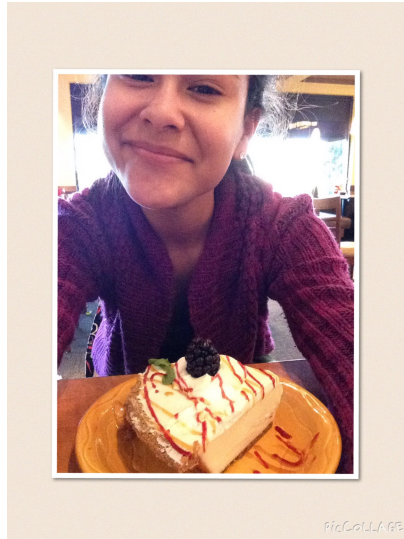


Figure 15. Paula With A Piece of Pie

All in all, participants presented various conversations about health topics that represented the often-confusing stage of adolescence. Although most participants felt that eating balanced meals and staying active were important in terms of their health, they were also highly aware of the fact that these activities produced a thinner physique. Some youth were motivated by this reason to exercise, while others simply enjoyed sports and doing physical activities with their families. Nevertheless, some did mention unhealthy practices but overall understood that this was not beneficial to their health.

Weight

In coordination with abovementioned findings, youth continually discussed their weight status. Although often these discussions were within the context of being healthy, youth did express, at times, various aspects of the ideal body. Throughout these discussions the topics of being skinny, proportional, muscular, and having defined abdominal muscles surfaced.

Skinny

The term skinny was utilized many times throughout the data collection process. This verbiage was commonly utilized when describing the ideal body, “I always think like ‘why I can’t I be that skinny or be that person that starts a trend,’” said Holly.

Participants frequently cited that many girls at school and those seen in the media were very thin. This is important to note because youth simultaneously expressed their ideas regarding being fit and healthy but also recognized that being “skinny” was an overriding social norm.

Proportions

Similar to these findings, being proportional was also a topic as participants frequently added this disclaimer when idealizing skinny individuals. Anna described this, “disproportional, too much muscle on top where it looks funny.” Anna continued to describe this as she spoke of an ideal body and healthy body image, “It’s because I don’t want to get above average (weight) for my height because I’m short.”

Being proportional became a reference for some participants who were considering their own proportions, as well as participants who were describing the ideal body. Participants did not see the merit of being thin, if it was not in keeping with their stature. Overall, participants viewed this aspect as equally important as being skinny when discussing the weight status of themselves and others.

Muscles and Abs

For many participants, being muscular and having abdominal definition helped achieve a proportional figure and achieving the ideal body type. Holly spoke about this at length along with her sister, “tall, skinny, and muscular but not disproportional. Holly cited having abs when discussing Figure 16. This photo of her doing planks represented a contest held at home between family members. She noted, “having good abs has good body image which is fit and healthy.”



Figure 16. Holly Doing Planks With Her Family

Overall, participants became much less clear-cut when discussing weight and health. While overall these topics produced appropriate conversations regarding the importance of physical activity,

Satisfaction and Acceptance

Happiness

Appearance related goals were not the only themes that emerged throughout the data collection process. Many participants factored in overall happiness when explaining body image and commenting on their photographs. As shown in Figure 17, many of the photos were selected by participants because they showed them being happy with their friends. Grace said, “well, I guess I really love this one because when I’m with her she makes me feel good and happy about myself. I love to smile even if I sad I’m smiling.”

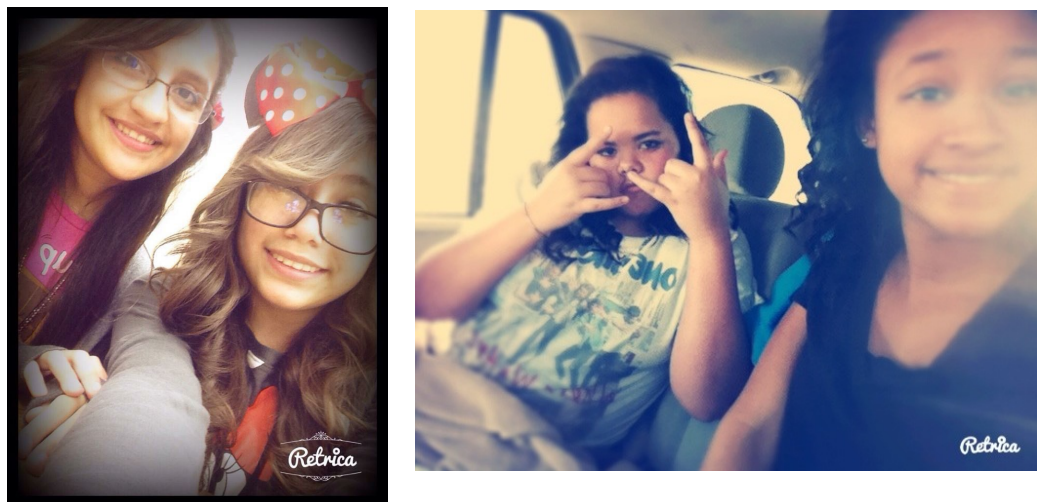


Figure 17. Girls With Their Friends

This idea was continually declared when discussing pictures like those in Figure 18, “I think I’m pretty happy all the time and I act happy.”



Figure 18. Grace Smiling

Acceptance

In addition to happiness, many participants discussed the importance of self-acceptance. Paula said, “I don’t have no feelings about my body. I don’t worry about what I look like because everyone should respect how they look, they don’t have to worry about other people.” This was echoed by Layla at the Lincoln Center who said, “My mom tells me that you’re your own person and that you’re unique in your own way. And you don’t have to make yourself look good for others.”

Over and over the participants expressed how they should be accepting of themselves and others in reference to overall acceptance and weight-related ideals. Avery mentions, “Some girls are meant to be like big and some girls are normal and some girls are really really skinny.”

This data also indicates that participants did not consider achieving appearance ideals as the most important priority. One participant even underscored this fact that appearance by explaining that body related issues should not be a priority in their lives. Julie especially felt this was important as she said, “A lot of girls focus on how they look and don’t focus on their grades as much as how their looks and hair and stuff.” Kelsey explained further:

“Some girls think they all that. They be like “I got this, I got this” Then they get a progress report and they don’t got it. Some people think that every day when they wake up they have to be all that and do everything they can to look perfect. But you don’t have to look perfect every day.”

These ideas were reverberated as participants produced photos and commentary related to school and homework. Paula stated the importance of rejecting appearance related goals and focusing on other activities, “I do homework every single day. It’s my favorite hobby. When they give homework I want homework because I’m learning stuff. ” Kate agreed, “a lot of girls focus on how they look and don’t focus on their grades as much as how their looks and hair and stuff.”

Many participants also viewed the rejection of appearance related activities such as wearing a lot of make-up or worrying about their hair as a statement against those who were, in their minds, overly concerned with their body image. For

example, many claimed that by not conforming to the more popular girls at school made a statement about their level of happiness and satisfaction with their bodies. Avery said, “sometimes I need to fix my hair and stuff but people like me for who I am and I don’t really care.” Kate agreed as she said, “I can show up in jeans and a raggedy t-shirt and be fine. I really don’t care.”

All in all, although most youth in the group were quick to connect their definitions of body image to appearance related issues, many youth also understood that their lives should focus on other aspects, like school. Additionally, youth displayed a clear understanding of the fact that there are many types of sizes, shapes, and appearances and that they should all be accepted and celebrated when contextualizing body image.

Religion

Another notable aspect of acceptance for these participants was the acceptance they found in their faith and religion. Many participants spoke about their chosen spirituality and attributed this effect as a reason they found acceptance with their bodies. Kim said, “my mom tells me that you’re your own person and that you’re unique in your own way. And you don’t have to make yourself look good for others because that’s the way God made you.”

Kate explained this in-depth for the group as she commentated on a photograph of her Christian jewelry seen in Figure 19, “I feel very happy that I’m a Christian and I feel happy that I have a big family that cares about me they would

do anything to help me. I can be myself. Jesus loves you then I love my body and I find acceptance in these things.”

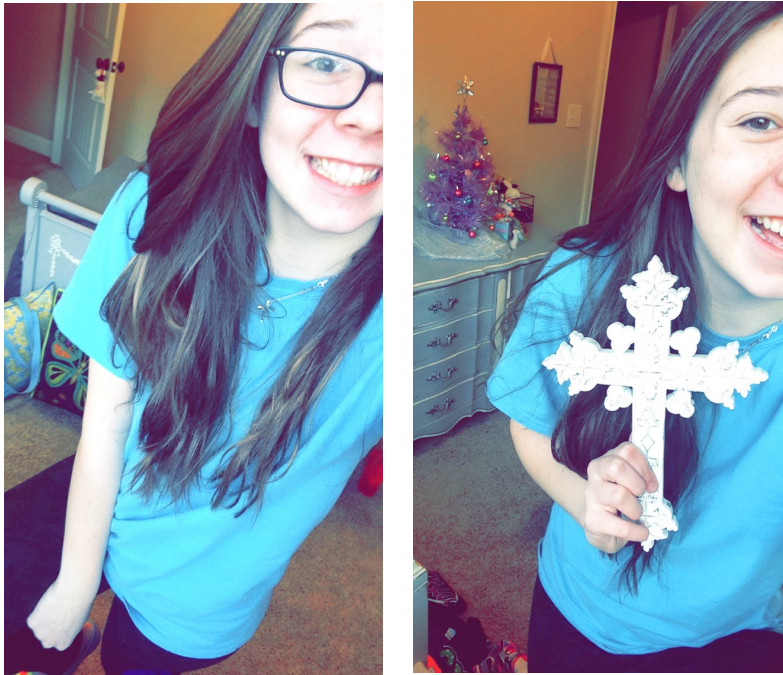


Figure 19. Kate Displaying Christian Symbols In Her Room

When asked if she had any body image concerns Kelsey responded in saying, “No because I like how God made me the way I am. And I just don’t have any problems.” Paula also noted her religion when commenting on the fact that other girls at school often feel unsatisfied with their bodies, “God made you who you are and they should respect that.”

These dynamics also emerge later in terms of the community found at church. However, in this case, participants felt their religion was an individual construct that allowed them to feel safe and accepted. This is important in the

construction of body image because these are tools the youth utilized to uphold their positive views on their body and of others.

Race and Ethnicity

African American Constructions of Body Image

Subtle but notable differences were viewed among the various sites. As mentioned, each site was chosen in order to begin to identify differences in body image constructions between various ethnicities. The overall discourse regarding body image for African American girls related to being a positive role model, representing their parents and families in positive ways, and associating with “proper” friends.

These associations made the researcher wonder if the youth truly understood the topic. Throughout the conversations, the researcher began to try and clarify and explain body image definitions in order to ensure the youth understood the concept. To exemplify this fact, Aaliyah stated:

“To me, body image is basically how you dress yourself and how you look and how you act around other people. So when you’re around other people you like to change how you act, like I do sometimes. Sometimes you want to do things that are wrong but you have to prevent yourself from doing those bad things.”

Overall, this definition was represented throughout the conversations with participants regarding their body image and although they did mention appearance related ideal at times, the main conversations revolved around “looking professional” and representing their families in a positive light. Kim said:

“Whenever I see myself I want myself to look professional where I go. My hair needs to be done right. I just want myself to look right when I’m

around other people because I don't like going out looking like someone I'm not supposed to be looking like. I like to dress in my own style and present myself in a good way. That's something my mom tells me. She says 'anywhere you go out, you represent me.'"

When the African American youth mentioned appearance related ideals, they did so much less than their counterparts—with the exception of discussing their hair. Using “real” hair and having long hair was of upmost importance to several of the youth. Kelsey explained:

“I see myself as someone special. I sometimes have issues with my hair. I get mad when I can't do my hair. People with long hair has pretty hair. It makes you look pretty. I don't like my hair, it's too short. My hair has to be right when I go out somewhere. Because if I go out somewhere with my hair not right, I think I look ugly.”

Regardless of this one appearance related struggle mentioned, the theme of upholding a proper image reverberated through the group. Kelsey illustrated, “At school I want to look right in front of my friends and I don't want to look jacked up! I want to look like I am good in my own way and that I take care of myself. That I'm healthy on the outside and joyful on the inside.”

Echoing these thoughts was the belief that they should associate themselves with appropriate friends. Layla used her photo, seen in Figure 20, to exemplify this dynamic, “I liked the one with the hat says fresh and the one with my arms crossed. It makes me feel like I'm just chilling with my friends and we are talking about something funny. Depending on the friends you hang out with. If you are hanging out with bad friends, then people think you are bad. Same with good friends. If they think you hang out with the good kids then they know you're a good person.”



Figure 20. Layla Looking “Fresh”

The idea of upholding proper behavior in order to set a good example in the family context was also mentioned when discussing photos that were unable to be taken due to the restrictions of the project. Kim said, “I would have taken one with my sister Harmony, my little sister, because she really wanted to take a picture with me. If I’m going around looking correctly, she needs to go around looking correctly.”

The constructions of African American youth were, although in keeping with the abovementioned external and internal process all girls had regarding body image, more grounded in cultural and familial values. This statement was easily embodied as Kelsey said:

“I just want myself to look right when I’m around other people because I don’t like going out looking like someone I’m not supposed to be looking like. I like to dress in my own style and present myself in a good way. That’s something my mom tells me. She says ‘anywhere you go out, you represent me.’ It all comes from who raises me and she wants to me to look I’m cared for.”

Hispanic Constructions of Body Image

Ethnically distinct conversations regarding also resounded through the group from Bryan Independent School District. Although this sample was not homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity, certain components of the Hispanic culture were topics of conversation.

Two of the youth in particular, Annabelle and Grace, discussed at great length Quinceañeras and their effect on body image. During the course of the project both girls had attended several Quinceañeras. Quinceañeras celebrations of a girl's fifteenth birthday and are considered the girls’ “coming out” into society.

These celebrations can be equated to the debutant balls seen in many European cultures.

The activities that surrounded these events brought up many body related issues for the girls as they were not only asked to participate in the celebrations by wearing large, prom-like dresses, but also asked to model for a dress store in the area for a photo shoot. Grace talked about this dynamic in depth:

“I always want to stay underweight for my 15 because last time I went for my dress it fit perfectly. The man in the store told me I wasn’t going to fit and I did. I proved both of them wrong. I got a discount b/c I told him it was going to fit me and he bet with me.”

Family Characteristics and Circumstances

In addition to the abovementioned individual characteristics and circumstances, family was a common theme throughout the data collection process. Negative and positive family narratives as well as pets served as the subthemes for this aspect of body image construction.

Negative Family Narratives

Negative information was infrequently presented to the researcher in regards to family dialogues. However, a few members did provide some information about negative comments regarding body image in their family units.

Grace spoke of one of these instances:

“My dad calls me “gordita” (chubby) and I want to prove him wrong. I like to prove my dad wrong; it’s like a victory. He thinks I’m overweight, and I’m like no this is normal for me. I tell him ‘I can show you so many people at my school’.”

Callie added:

“I have family members and cousins that sometimes don’t know what they’re saying but it hurts me anyway. They tell me stuff like ‘don’t eat’ to make me think I should be skinnier. I think it’s weird because no one should tell me how I feel about my body.”

These examples were the only examples of negative family narratives being present for participants in the sample. Overall, youth mentioned the positive discourses that surround their family lives.

Positive Family Narratives

Overall Acceptance

Overwhelmingly families were viewed as uplifting figures in participant’s lives. It was not uncommon during conversations for the girls to reference uplifting phrases and conversations they had with their families. Isabelle stated, “my family says to be okay and be who you are and if you’re comfortable that’s all that matters.”

To participants, being around family meant that they could be free to play and make jokes without fear of judgment from their peers. Many youth discussed how at school, it was difficult to “be themselves” for fear of judgment from the more “popular girls.” Nevertheless, youth felt their families were more accepting of all aspects of their personalities. Holly explains this, “when I’m around my family I can be myself I don’t have to be another person.”

These comments were often in response to the fact that youth oftentimes felt pressures to act and look in a certain way when surrounded by peers. In many

ways Holly felt the need to make jokes and be silly but couldn't because of judgmental onlookers at school, "At school I don't act like myself or around certain groups but when I'm around my family I can dance around."

Participants also understood that they could rely on their families to as support through various body and life related issues. Kim noted, "I take a lot of my stuff from my mom. She's still teaching me about life and my appearance. She'll say, 'you represent me because I'm your mom.' and the way you dress is the way I've taught you."

Overall participants felt they could act natural around their families. This was related to their body image because participants felt judged at school in many ways including how they act, dress, and on their appearance. Therefore, the family represents a safe place of belonging for participants, which coincides with their need for acceptance and belonging in terms of their body image.

Size/Appearance Related Conversations

Beyond feeling at ease around family, many youth referenced conversations with their families specifically regarding their size and appearance. Annabelle explained, "my parents – they always tell me to like never try and look like other girls and don't put on makeup so young because it doesn't show who you really are and just be yourself. There's only one you in the world so may as well stay like that." The participants referenced their family and a feeling of overall acceptance within their family units when referencing size and appearance related

conversations. Annabelle explained further, “my family all has different sizes and they always tell me to be happy who I am because I’m only one person.”

Overall, these positive dialogues with family proved to be positive reinforcements for participants in formulating positive body images. However, family conversations were not the only unit within the home that youth utilized.

Pets

One surprising theme that emerged was that of pets. Participants submitted many photographs with their pets and at times, had difficulty justifying how these photos reflected their body image. However after extensive conversations, the participants began to attribute their pets as part of their “community” and realized they took these photographs because their pets represented another place where they received no judgments about their bodies. When commenting on Figure 21 Yvie said, “the cat doesn’t judge me, he doesn’t care and doesn’t look at me weird, he just doesn’t care or judge me.”

After hearing these statements Kate said, “I guess I would have wanted to take a pic with my real dog because like she said, he doesn’t judge me and his eyes are so pretty when you look into them you feel so much better. He’s not fluffy but he’s warm; but the real dogs wouldn’t stay still.”

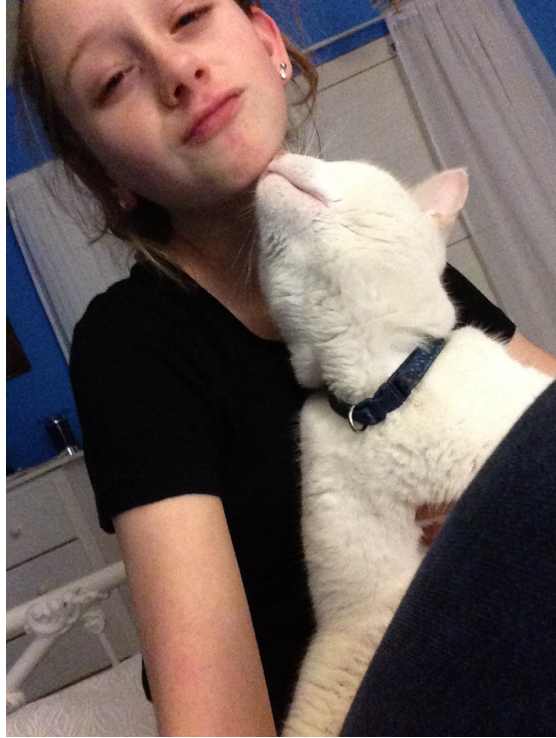


Figure 21. Yvie With Her Cat

Overall, the theme of pets was one that was unexpected. However, the connection the participants made with their animals was notable as many participants found their pets to be an integral part of their everyday lives.

In summary, acceptance participants found in the home from their families and pets overshadowed the abovementioned negative comments regarding body image. Nevertheless, youth also utilized community entities to formulate their body image.

Community Characteristics and Circumstances

Definitions of Community

Although participants did not explicitly attempt to define “community”, they most often referenced their surroundings like peers at school, extra-curricular activities, and their pets their “community” domain. This construction was considered as various community characteristics and circumstances were explored.

Here, church involvement, interaction with peers at school—who were not considered friends, feedback from boys, and extracurricular activities represented themes in the participant’s community.

Church Involvement

In relation to the earlier discussed religious influences, participants also often mentioned church activities and attending church throughout conversations. Participants not only viewed faith as an individual influence for body image but also considered the relationships and bonds found in the church as a factor in the shaping of their body image. Examples of church functioning as a community entity included Annabelle and Grace attending a weekly class at the church and Aaliyah’s parents owning a church, as seen in Figure 22.

Kim even noted that the feedback she received from others at church as a place she received information about her body image, “Church too. People say that I’m pretty and they say that I have pretty hair.”



Figure 22. Aaliyah at Her Parents' Church

Another aspect of church discussed was that of singing. Singing and music was cited as an unwavering aspect in the daily lives of participants. In all contexts, music was seen as an empowerment tool for positive body image. Participants cited singing inspirational music as a way to promote and reinforce positive body image. In one case a participant mentioned singing at Quinceañeras (or 15s) as well as church as an example for her musical outlets. Grace explained, “Music. I like music and to sing at church and in 15s.”

Overall the church served as yet another outlet for expression as well as a space to gain feedback from others outside of the family unit.

Narratives From Female Counterparts

Participants were also very expressive about the feedback received from their peers at school. Most of this conversation revolved around the “popular girls” and was overwhelmingly negative. Participants viewed other girls at school as individuals that often offered unwanted feedback. For the most part this feedback was most often seen as unwanted and was quickly rejected by the youth.

However, in the case of one participant this rejection was not always easy. Callie talked about this fully during our initial interview, “I’ve been bullied my entire life about my body. I always thought I got bullied about how I looked and I always thought that what other people thought mattered more than my thoughts about myself.”

As she expressed her struggles with body image and the feedback she received from her peers at school and within her family home, Callie was also able to process some of these feelings throughout the sharing circle exercise. She quickly became aware that these feelings did not matter and did not determine her body satisfaction status, “I was in a state of depression for like 5 months because I didn’t want to eat anything and I’m just now learning in 2015 that I can’t worry about what other people say.”

In another conversation Paula explained Callie’s struggles further, “she tells us she’s depressed because people tell her stuff about her body and it makes me

concerned. She should not think of what other people say and that's how I know I shouldn't think like that."

These types of comments were not experienced by just one individual, as Isabelle explained, "the rude stuff always sticks out over the nice stuff even though sometimes people tell me I'm a 10."

Nevertheless, the girls did express their yearning for positive feedback from others at school. Kim explained, "when I come out the house I want people to be like 'she's so cute, I like her.'"

Layla looked to Figure 23 when discussing this topic, "those are my moms glasses, they are really pretty. If you go to school everyone would be like 'I love your glasses' and I would be like, 'I know right!'"



Figure 23. Layla In Her Mom’s Sunglasses

Overall, the participants recognized that their friend groups and positivity throughout their school community was more important than the girls who bullied and spoke negatively. Avery said, “I just fit in with people like me we all have our separate groups at school.”

Comments about the “fakes” and “wannabes” resonated throughout conversations as the participants discussed the importance of rejecting feedback from these groups and appreciating their more uplifting friendships. Isabelle explained, “the girls that have Starbucks after school and do #basic.” Avery echoed this, “the popular girls look really pretty but our group is just a group that acts like themselves.”

Along with these thoughts, a few of the participants noted that their peers were sometimes partaking in activities such as dating, which was not allowed in their household. Kelsey said, “sometimes I do take things from my friends but if it’s like dating I don’t get involved. My friends will be like ‘oh I have a boyfriend’ don’t want to do that but my mom doesn’t allow me to do that. I just don’t feel that’s right to go behind your mothers back or anything.”

Narratives From Male Counterparts

Along these lines, participants were also quick to note that boys were a strong influence in their school. Although youth did not explicitly discuss dating they did reference the fact that other girls at school were very reliant on boys’ opinions. Kate said, “some girls at my school they think that if they have a good body shape then it can attract boys.” Annabelle added, “girls like to show off their bodies to impress guys.”

For this group, the understanding was mixed. Although they did not celebrate the actions other girls displayed when attracting boys, they did mention that boys were more receptive to certain body types. Anna said, “guys only want to go out with the pretty girls, the skinny girls.”

Throughout discussion about boys, the topic of Internet celebrities and messages sent from male idols surfaced. At one site, youth were very involved in following Internet celebrities who disseminate positive body image messages. A group of boys were highlighted because they have created a clothing line for both boys and girls at Aeropostale—a popular clothing store.

When asked to relate these messages to body image Paula exclaimed, “They got so much body image.... like good body image,” while Callie explained further, “These guys had their own clothing line at Aeropostale and wanted people to be united and to know they should all love each other. It’s all boys but they get girls to model their clothes.”

As the discussion continued, I questioned further as the girls began to process the fact that the positive body image messages coming from boys were more substantial than if the messages were coming from other girls. Paula expanded on this idea, “they [girls in general] don’t think about the girls in the same way because they aren’t going to marry a boy. It helps to have a boy that keeps you up and is with you all the time.”

As the conversation went on, participants began to mention other boys who have become famous via social media because of their messages about body image. One example was from Callie who followed an individual named “Weekly Chris” who gives weekly pep talks to girls regarding body image:

“Regular boys only want one kind of girl, and all of those boys like ‘Weekly Chris’ they know that you are beautiful and they want you to feel loved and they want to send that love back and that you’re beautiful the way you.”

Paula added,

“I think when they [United Creators] got famous they realized different types of girls [all sizes] they had to think about it and be like ‘we have all these different kind of girls and we have to be respectful to them for who they are.’ I think it means more coming from boys so girls.”

Callie and Isabelle even traveled together during the ten day period to visit two Internet celebrities who became famous on the video sharing website, Vine. The youth expressed that they wanted to share these photos with me as well but cited the restrictions of the research projects as reasons they could not. They did provide a photo of them traveling to the event in Figure 24.



Figure 24. Callie and Isabelle Traveling to Visit Vine Celebrities

These conversations are evidence that the girls are beginning to process their future relationships with boys and are beginning to take their opinions into consideration when constructing their body image. However, participants realized they wanted a partner that was accepting in many ways. This realization is likely because of the participants witnessing boys responding to certain body types

(skinny girls) at school. When participants noted that boys only liked the skinny girls, they utilized these realizations to shape requirements for their future partners.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Participants also discussed at great length, their involvement with various extracurricular activities such as sports and gymnastics. Julie celebrated the friendships and connections made through sports, “Volleyball is a big part of my life and when I’m with my team I feel great, like when you score a point you feel good to celebrate together.”

To many participants, these activities were also seen as an outlet and a place to “get away” from the everyday pressures of middle school. Holly continued to illustrate, “whenever I’m on the court I don’t think about myself which means I don’t judge myself, so it’s like a no judgment zone for me, they don’t judge your body they judge the skill that you have.

Avery directly connected sports to her abilities and the issues of body image, “Some girls at school are crazy skinny and sometimes I wish I could be like that but sometimes, I’m glad because I couldn’t do sports because I’d be too weak and wimpy.”

All in all participants saw their extra activities as a way to express themselves and “get away” from the everyday pressures and judgments of their peers at school. The connections made between teammates were considered an important part of the youth’s community, as they were able to often make friends through activities outside of a school setting.

Discussion

It was necessary to gain a clear picture of the unique trajectories of female adolescent's body dissatisfaction on a microlevel. Identification of awareness and internalization of the thin ideal as central components in the development of body dissatisfaction can aid in highlighting potential preventative, intervention targets (Cash, 2004; Cash & Smolak, 2011). To do this it was necessary employ research to obtain a deeper understanding of how adolescent females define body image. Overall, this research supports previous findings that feature body image as a multifaceted concept (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Polce-Lynch et al., 2001; Shea, 2012).

Additionally, the prevailing agenda in body image research revolved around perceived weight status and the thin-ideal. However, it remained necessary to also shed light on the other sociocultural factors that contribute to body image constructions for young people (Madden, 2011). Therefore, this study aimed to view body image issues in relation to sociocultural factors. Body image was discussed as a multidimensional, complex concept throughout this study. Participants spoke of the various sociocultural factors in their lives that affected their body image. This complex understanding of body image emerged from various discussions regarding individual, family, and community characteristics. As a whole, the themes that emerged revealed both a rejection and acceptance of dominant Western discourses revolving around beauty and the body.

Individual Characteristics and Circumstances

The individual characteristics that emerged included appearance related characteristics, health, internal narratives, religion, and race/ethnicity. Unsurprisingly participants' equated body image to several appearance related characteristics. These characteristics were broad in many ways. However, after further conversations the specific aspects of appearance related characteristics emerged. These results were expected, as these participants are experiencing the challenging phases of adolescence. This phase can be a particularly interesting time for body image formation as youth are navigating through the confusing time between adulthood and childhood. For adolescent females, this is especially relevant in terms of body image formation, as they are often experiences various side effects of body changes due to puberty. This is also a time when skin, hair, facial characteristics, muscularity, and strength are in various phases of transformation. Additionally, adolescence represents a phase of maturation where appearance related goals surface (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Therefore, the conversations regarding makeup, blemishes and overall appearance were in keeping with the phase of life the youth are experiencing.

Appearance related characteristics were not the only factors utilized in the shaping of body image. Health related factors were also at the forefront of conversation as many participants spoke of the importance of balancing healthy and unhealthy foods which solidifies their understanding of body image in a health related sense. This is confirmed by Frisen and Holmqvist (2010) who noted several

characteristics of those with positive body image. These characteristics include having a functional view of the body, viewing exercise as a joyful and health promoting practice and a natural part of life. Those with this outlook were more accepting of their bodies, quick to disregard imperfections, and had positive body image. It was clear throughout the study that youth were often able to look past appearance related factors and view body image as a health related component in this manner which further confirms their self-reported body image satisfaction status. Nevertheless, this insight was not without challenges as a few youth struggled to recognize and practice healthy eating habits. As one youth noted, she often skipped breakfast and restricted her eating in order to remain thin. Although she later mentions that she has come to understand that this is not healthy body image, these struggles show that the path to successful and healthy body image is not always straight for many in this age group. Other individuals echoed this by speaking about eating salads and having to run around the neighborhood to remain thin. These actions continually represent these struggles and are of importance in the context of the formation of body image for these girls since it is known that body image satisfaction is not static and can change from day-to-day. Nevertheless, the participant's conversations about eating habits did present positive indicators for positive body image characteristics. As their conversations regarding balanced meals and indicators of youth's understanding of intuitive eating. Intuitive eating is a health related concept that is employed when individuals utilize food for functional and palate pleasing purposes rather than for mood management or

dieting purposes. Therefore, youth who choose to eat sweets at certain times while also being cognizant of eating healthy, balanced meals are likely employing intuitive eating, and likely have higher body appreciation (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011).

Some participants also noted that weight was a motivator for physical activity and eating practices. This may also be an indicator of the challenges these girls face when it comes to formulating positive body image and may also be an indicator that an intervention is necessary during this phase of adolescence in order to ensure the prevention of eating disorders and promote health (Sherwood, Neumark-Sztainer, 2001; Denny et al., 2013).

Regardless, most youth were strongly aware of these concepts in a purely health related sense. In relation to physical activity, many youth also equated participation in sports as a way of forming bonds between friends and family and were therefore able to distinguish health and leisure outcomes from weight outcomes. The importance of sports in a health related sense is important as youth sports are known to instill capacities that allow youth to build adult-like capacities. Coakley (2011) notes that sports are known to foster personal character development, serve “at risk” populations, facilitates the formation of social networks, and fosters social capital. When these capacities are exhibited, it is known as the “fertilizer effect”. This means that when youth participate in sports, their character and potential will grow in socially desirable ways—including

positive body image. Therefore, it is unsurprising that youth noted their relationships between friends and teammates when contextualizing body image.

Overall, these results appear to be unmatched by previous body image research in the United States as the literature largely focuses on weight, BMI, and body dissatisfaction (Smolak, 2003; Cash & Smolak, 2011). However, studies of aboriginal populations in Canada reveal that youth in these areas associate body image very strongly with a more holistic model (Shea, 2012). These findings therefore provide evidence for further research on this topic in order to fully conceptualize health in relation to body image research.

Participants also mentioned being skinny, muscular, proportional, and having abs as features of an ideal body. These statements were also expected as youth often associate these qualities with idealized bodies. This has long been attributed to the effect of the media (Tiggemann, 1996; Tiggemann et al., 2013). In keeping with this point, youth often referenced overall acceptance when discussing weight-related ideals. Therefore, it is plausible to state that youth were accepting of many body types and held an overall realization that although appearance related factors were a part of body image constructions, they were not the primary or most important aspect. These findings are also in keeping with emerging research that revealed that having positive body image allows for youth to accept all aspects of their bodies. This acceptance is oftentimes based on optimism, an extensive notion of beauty, and a functional view of the body (Tiggemann, & McCourt, 2013; Frisén & Holmqvist, 2010).

This idea was exemplified as youth discussed the importance of qualities such as grades and intelligence. To the researcher's knowledge, these themes are relatively unexplored in preceding literature. Although youth do associate inward and outward positivity with body image, exploring in-depth aspects of happiness in relation to body image is necessary (Tylka, 2011).

Faith and religion were also predominating aspects of body image constructions for several youth. Religion has been known to promote healthy body image by providing a source of self-worth for individuals. Religious commitment has also been shown to be positively related body image satisfaction in college women (Inman, Iceberg & McKell, 2014). In regards to this age group, these findings are also meaningful as youth have been historically known to utilize faith in a number of cognitive, affective, and behavioral ways (Warren, Lerner & Phelps, 2011). This is largely due to the developmental pathways that religion and spirituality can provide for youth (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Religiosity has also been shown to be a protective factor for African American girls in the formulation of negative body image (Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014). This occurs because religious ideals allow youth to be resilient to negative effects of sexism, negative health behaviors, and substance abuse on development. Affiliation with religious groups can also boost girls' self-esteem. However, few studies, have fully examined the role of religiosity/spirituality in African American adolescent girls' body image (Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to engage

in this type of inquiry for not only African American populations but adolescent female populations as a whole.

In keeping with discussions regarding ethnic populations, it is important to note that the conversations that took place at each site in regards to race and ethnicity were not conspicuous. However, a notable distinction was present between the group of African American adolescents as well as a select few Hispanic youth.

In regards to the African American youth, their overall constructions of body image were much more centered on familial expectations and positive representations. As stated, youth often resorted to explaining body image by referencing the importance of being a good role model to their siblings or upholding proper family values. Youth also spoke of looking professional and representing their families well in relation to their constructions of body image. As noted, youth at the Lincoln Center did not mention many appearance related goals. This may be due to the fact that they were not permitted to wear make-up or dress in a highly sexualized manner. This is contrasted with girls in the other two groups as they often spoke of make-up and displayed photographs where they were very dressed up and wore a great deal of makeup. These differences are supported in previous literature that states African American females traditionally equate qualities such as being well-groomed and expressing confidence with positive body image (Tylka, 2011). The topic of socioeconomic status may also be a contributor to these thought processes as access to certain forms of make-up or hair treatments

may be limited for this group. Therefore, the shift in priority from beauty and aesthetics to being well-groomed and respectable is plausible when considering the discourse that takes place between the girls and their caregivers.

The findings related to conversations centered on familial expectations are also supported in previous literature that states that familiar influences often serve as a protective factor against body image dissatisfaction as youth are often educated on various aspects of being Black such as its history, meaning and significance to American culture (Patton, 2006). These constructions then serve to allow youth to resist dominant cultural messages that may contribute to body dissatisfaction.

In regards to struggles with hair appearance for African American girls, Pope, Corona and Belgrave, (2014) found that African American adolescents are taught from an early age to believe that “thicker, curly hair is unattractive and unmanageable” (p. 314). This is especially true as previous studies have shown that African American adolescent girls have a preference for long, straight hair over natural, curly or shorter hair (Pope, Corona, & Belgrave, 2014). However, historically these norms are vastly contradicted by the African American community due to the fact that these norms exemplify a conformity to White standards of beauty (Patton, 2006). Therefore, the fact that the girls in this study mentioned struggles with their hair when they did criticize their body or spoke of body image issues was quite foreseeable and an indicator that they may be inclined to idolize this aspect of White ideals. Further discovery on this aspect of body image for African American females is necessary. Nevertheless, both the positive

and negatives associations with body image are evidence that youth are highly intuitive to the influences imparted by their family and cultural identities.

In a similar vein, the Hispanic youth as a whole did not mention a great deal of information regarding negative body image constructions. The youth did note significant occasions in their culture that caused them to focus more on their body image. The discussion on Quinceañeras was in keeping with Mexican American culture as Quinceañeras celebrates a girl's passage into womanhood and is the key coming of age tradition in many Latino cultures. This event is therefore not only viewed as a rite of passage but also a way for girls to begin to identify with gender standards in their culture, which includes cooking meals for the family and being nurturing to others (Alvarez, 2007). Therefore, the focus on body image is likely associated with the ideals surrounding gender identity within their cultural realms as the girls were beginning to see themselves as not only entering society but also beginning the first stages of embracing these aspects of feminine culture in their household. Therefore, the focus on beauty, femininity, and womanliness was expected as this event symbolizes these aspects of the girl's culture.

The few negative constructions of body image are also notable. These constructions could be largely impart due to the fact that youth who heavily associate with their culture often struggle to construct multiple ethnic, national, and gendered identities (Elk, 2009). In this case, although the youth were excited and spoke positively about their Quinceañeras, it also forced them to think about their role as a woman within their culture. This line of thinking made the girls critically

analyze their bodies in relation to other women in their culture as well as other girls who were also turning 15 around the same time period. This was likely a reasons for conversations surrounding fitting into certain dresses and weight gain during this time. Therefore, although the hype and excitement surrounding these events was positive for the girls in terms of embracing an aspect of their culture, it also proved detrimental in some ways as it made the girls keenly aware of their body size and appearance. With this knowledge in mind, it is assumed that the construction of gendered identities for these youth was a blending of both cultures and although the youth didn't explicitly discuss this dynamic, the strong associations with events such as Quinceañeras, indicates a need for further understanding of how the blending of both cultures specifically effects their body image.

Family Characteristics and Circumstances

Beyond the individual factors that affect one's body image, participants also strongly relied on their family and friend to foster a positive body image. Here family and friends were dominant figures in the youth's sociocultural realms. This is supported by previous literature that shows that over time youth are able to utilize connections to family and friends to contemplate and override negative messages (Crespo et al, 2010; Webb, & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2014). All in all, it is apparent that participants exercised resilience regarding negatively driven narratives about their bodies. This is likely attributed to the fact that the youth did not appear to rely heavily on this negative feedback. It has been shown that when

youth find negative comments innocuous, they will likely disregard them (Calogero, Herbozo, & Thompson, 2009). However, it is also known that girls who have negative family relations are more likely to engage in problematic dieting (Byely et al., 2010). Therefore, this dynamic is an important one to explore further in order to understand the internal attributes these participants possess that allow them to negate negative commentary from family members. However, the negative conversations were limited and the concept of positive family affirmation was highlighted. Crespo et al (2010) noted that especially in the case of females, higher levels of family connectedness predicated higher levels of body satisfaction overtime. Thus, illustrating how families also serve as a protective factor against the risks of body dissatisfaction.

The topic of pets also emerged. Youth found acceptance with their pets in reference to body image. Regardless, it is plausible to assume that youth find their relationship with their pets similar to that of their familial influence and therefore view pets as another outlet for acceptance in their lives. Although not outwardly viewed in body image literature, pets are known to have mental health benefits due to their therapeutic attributes. Additionally, one study noted that guide dogs aided human comparisons to improved body image, relaxation, expression of emotions, and overall acceptance (Cusack, 2014). To my knowledge this finding is highly emergent and another avenue for future inquiry.

Community Characteristics and Circumstances

Community characteristics in this study was unique as youth did not define their communities in a traditional manner. However, the entities that were in the peripheral were contextualized as community for these young people. As a whole, youth utilized the feedback from others in their community as another way to understand their body image.

Much like the abovementioned ties to religion, youth noted church involvement as a place where they received messages about their bodies. Youth most often referenced the positive feedback and associations found with those at church rather than the internal acceptance they found in their religion. Therefore, youth utilized multiple types of relationships to formulate their body image.

Youth also noted and rejected many negative discourses experienced at school by peers and boys. Youth who feel that they are accepted and well-connected to their peer group have more positive perceptions of themselves and their bodies (Michael et al., 2014). Throughout this study youth continually discussed the popular girls as an inferior group and constantly negated the negative conversations. This may be an indicator that youth do not consider themselves as connected to their peer groups but have exercised resilience in order to negate the comments and expectations of these groups. The conversations had with their parents in regards to the negative commentary at school are also another reinforcing factor when rejecting these influences. Parental influences once again serving as a protective factor in the negation of negative body image issues (Crespo et al, 2010).

The topic of boys also emerged. Youth in this study seemed uncharacteristically uninterested in the boys at school. Instead, youth discussed boys once again, in a peripheral context. Conversations about how boys will treat them in the future and how boys at school do not have a firm grasp on these expectations indicate that youth were disinterested in dating. Some youth noted not being allowed to date. Therefore, these conversations may again indicate that parental factors are effective in terms of mitigating the need to impress boys for this age group.

Finally, extra-curricular activities made up the last component of the youth's community. Youth were keenly aware of the fact that their extracurricular activities served as an outlet for expression. These effects have been seen widely in youth development literature, as youth programs are known to allow youth to build many capacities that aid their development. In relation to body image, sports, the most cited extracurricular activity have been found to provide youth with opportunities to be physically active and to learn important life skills such as cooperation, discipline, leadership, and self-control. These qualities all contribute to positive body image formation, as they are considered important to youth's psychosocial development in addition to providing opportunities for health formation and physical activity. Therefore these findings continue to advocate for youth programs that support these types of developmental assets (Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008).

General Discussion

Overall, youth in this study displayed positive body image. It is known that characteristics that foster positive body image include “unconditional acceptance from important others, media literacy, environments/cultures that broadly conceptualize beauty, and the belief that a higher power thoughtfully designs each person to be unique” (Tylka, 2011, p. 58). These were all factors that were emulated throughout this study. Therefore it is also plausible to presume that youth have the positive characteristics that are commonly exhibited by those with positive body image. These characteristics include inner-positivity, adaptive behaviors, and possibly mentoring others to love their body. Therefore, youth with these qualities can serve as important subjects for furthering the understanding of positive body image formation. However, since this view on body image research is relatively new within the last decade, it is important to conduct longitudinal studies to determine the strongest predictors and consequences of positive body image (Tylka, 2011). This type of research is especially necessary when looking at the struggles that the girls faced with much health related aspects of body image in order to develop a full understanding of these dynamics.

Although avenues for future research were outlined in this section, it is important to note overreaching goals for future research. Now that current understanding have been outlined throughout this study, it is important to contextualize these further in relation to specific ethnic groups. This study attempted to begin this examination. However, the populations should be studied

further in relation to intersectionality. Intersectionality is the way in which constructs are formulated based on multiple facets in youth's lives—class, race, age, and gender are examples. Many studies view gender as the primary basis for social relations. However, understanding how these groups construct body image in relation to all of these components is important in order to allow researchers to conceptualization these issues over the entire overarching social system (González, 2007).

In relation to practice these findings are also significant. Future work should focus on how these specific circumstances can aid interventions and programming. As an example, programmers should develop curriculum that incorporates sociocultural factors into prevention methods. These findings also indicate that family centered education may be the most effective type of programming since youth utilize their familial influences to mediate negative discourses related to body image.

With respect to various ethnic groups, programmers should also employ methods to reach different populations in culturally relevant ways as culture was seen in some cases to cause different constructions of body image.

This study showed that youth who were associated with religion were accepting of their bodies, thus proving that religion is a factor that influences and possibly maintains positive body image. Therefore religious beliefs and values should be considered when looking to encourage and maintain positive body image. Since religion and spirituality appeared as themes in regards to individual

and community characteristics, it is equally important to focus on not only individual spiritual development but also religious organizations as a whole.

Limitations

The purposeful nature of the sample must be deliberated when considering limitations to the research study. The data collection process was astringent but the very nature of studying a core group of individuals regarding their personal feelings about their body image could have skewed results. Additionally, the fact that the sample contained two sets of identical twins one would presume that their media usage and sociocultural influences are quite similar. This serves as a limitation due to the fact that it makes the sample more heterogeneous.

In regards to body image formation, this study did not assess whether youth were internalizing negative thoughts on their body image. Therefore, it is unknown if youth were projecting a positive body image as a partial facade in front of their peers or if they truly embody the qualities that formulate positive body image.

Furthermore, the Photovoice method itself lends to the necessary notation of limitations. Although this methodology combines research, activism, and participation from research subjects, this data alone is not sufficient to raise the amount of community awareness needed to inspire long-term sustainable change. Furthermore, when allowing youth to create the content needed to analyze the data (photographs) the researcher must relinquish a certain amount of control when it comes to upholding proper photography principals. Although youth were trained, the nature of armature photography allows for a focal point or necessary aspect of a

photo to be lost; and although the interview process will help to negate this effect, this is still considered a limitation.

Conclusions

The findings of this study contribute to body image literature in three ways. First, this study was vital because baseline knowledge of positive body image constructions for this age group has been researched very little. While many studies have been conducted with great specificity, (i.e. in regards to body image dissatisfaction, athleticism, eating disorders, etc.) the amount of body image research that has focused on positive, adaptive, or healthy constructions of body image has not been a strong area of focus (Cash & Smolak, 2011). Therefore, this type of research was necessary in order to create proper conceptual foundations for youth that are satisfied with their bodies in order to effectively design prevention efforts aimed to support and inspire healthy behaviors. Since all youth in this study claimed to have positive body image while still illustrating the struggles many girls face with body image issues, it was the hope that these youth give a voice to the processes and challenge that contribute to these positive constructions.

Secondly, although research has explored the multifaceted relationships among the sociocultural and individual psychological variables that influence body image, understanding the changes is crucial for designing effective prevention and intervention programs.

Thirdly, in accordance with recommendations from Cash & Smolck (2011), it was important to conduct more qualitative research on these issues in order to

begin to understand the micro level processes that occur in the formation of body image for this age group. Although it was highly recommended to conduct qualitative research on youth under the age of 8, this study still broadens the knowledge on adolescence female populations. Studying this age group is of continued importance as youth in middle school often begin to change their thoughts and opinions about their bodies. Therefore, pinpointing these changes is important when it comes to understanding where and how to conduct interventions.

All in all this study sheds light on issues related to the formulation of body image. In this context, the ideas related to positive body image were emergent. These origin of this positivity was disused through the voices of the youth in this study. Overall, it is necessary to continue to fully understand these processes utilizing multiple theoretical lenses in order to continue to shape and formulate programming to perpetuate positive body image for youth.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT I LOOK “LIKE”: ADOLESCENT FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS WITH MASS MEDIA AND ITS EFFECT ON BODY IMAGE: A PHOTOVOICE STUDY

Introduction

A sizable body of research across many disciplines reported the effect of body image on young women (Cash, 2004). Much of this scholarship pertains to fitness, self-confidence, leisure activities, mental health, and many other psychological characteristics (Kleiber et al, 2005). This vast research is unsurprising as research shows 95 percent of females overestimate their body size, particularly their cheeks, waist, hips and thighs (Shrader, 2007). Therefore, understanding how media imagery shapes body image is imperative changing young women’s perceptions of their body image and improving mental and physical health (Liechty, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2006).

The media effects gender identity, stereotypes, and reinforces social norms in many aspects of society. Additionally, American children often cite their favorite activities as watching television, using the computer, and playing video games. Access to these forms of media often reinforces gender stereotypes as the images transmitted through mass media often features thin, beautiful women. Furthermore, the aforementioned popular forms of mass media are sedentary activities that also perpetuate unhealthy behaviors in young females with aids in the formulation of negative body image (James, 2000; Liechty, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2006). To

contrast, Taveras et al., (2004) also found that youth may participate in over exercising if exposed to social perpetuated norms.

Society most often perpetuates these unrealistic ideals of women through mass media channels. These outlets have been harshly criticized for spreading and creating unrealistic cultural standards for women and adolescents (Strahan et al., 2008). For example, a 2003 study showed that although only 5% of American women are underweight, 30% of female characteristics are portrayed as underweight in popular television shows. This overrepresentation of thin women sends the message that “thin is in” and has expanded its reach in the past decade with the onset of social media outlets (Perlof, 2014). Furthermore, the fact that heavier characters are depicted in a negative manner further exacerbates the body dissatisfaction process (Nabi & Oliver, 2009).

North American culture also plays a role in the development of body image as physical attractiveness is highly valued. Due to this, women often put a great deal of time, energy, and money into pursuing appearance goals to meet these standards. Evidence also suggests that these consequences may be especially harmful to women, who tend to experience greater body dissatisfaction and who have often come to expect that they will be judged more harshly on their appearance than men (Buote et al., 2011).

It is arguable that these pressures are equally as present in young females as adolescents grew up in the first decade of the new millennium and came of age during the “digital revolution,” a time of vast and speedy technological

development. During this time, television, movies, radio, and magazines became increasingly accessible and readily available to young people. The traditional or older media (television, movies, radio, and magazines) were all fundamentally changing in the face of the swift adoption of newer digital media such as social networking sites and music and video sharing on the Internet, MP3 players, and mobile phones and therefore transformed the manner in which young people received information (Brown, & Bobkowski, 2011).

While beauty ideals can be transmitted in many ways to young people, the mass media represents the most powerful and persuasive sociocultural transmitter (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). A 2005 school-based study found that 69% of preadolescent and adolescent females were unhappy with their bodies and attributed this discontent to the influence of fashion magazines (Field et al., 2005). Digital media also has effect as Bell, Lawton and Dittmar (2007) found that adolescent females exposed to thin models in music videos show a significantly larger increase in body dissatisfaction from pre- to post-exposure in comparison to females who had listened to the songs without visual accompaniments.

As noted, the growth of social media outlets has also aided in the perpetuation of the “thin-ideal.” Social media outlets are more personal than mass media due to the fact that individuals can connect to technology and create their own content. This content can revolved around the self, and can take any form (Perloff, 2014). Social networking sites are designed to harbor social interactions in a digital environment. Communication on these networks in facilitated through a

network profile that often includes personnel information and a photographs of the profile owner. These profiles are utilized to portray an identity to other users—an identity that is also generated by the profile owner. The interactions that take place on social media are utilized to address many concerns of adolescence and emerging adulthood, such as the need for friendship and peer feedback (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Additionally, these sites are utilized to connect users to celebrities and public figures.

For these reasons it is important to firstly understand the role body image has in perpetuating and contributing to these statistics in order to effectively design prevention efforts aimed to support and inspire healthy behaviors for adolescents.

Conceptual Framework

Image Engagement

The ways of viewing the world have always been culturally and visually focused. In order to fully grasp the manner in which these processes are taking place, one must also understand the way society as a whole, views and processes images. Images in our society are directly related to social comparisons, as we are accosted by the media, advertisements, and images of people each day (Betts, 2013). However, over the course of time, the ways society processes, views, and consumes images have changed. Their importance and significance conversely have not (Mitchell, 1995; Sontag, 1977; Olsen, 2007). Scholars have analyzed the ways images govern and authorize, remember and memorize, perform and see,

consume and commodify, protest and promote, and of course, make arguments and persuade people in western society and beyond.

In relation to current research, it is necessary to look at the way images function in the shaping of the female body image. Visual scholars have done this in many ways. However, the manner in which visuals make *arguments* and *persuade* is most intriguing due to the fact that it often inspires behavior change—a key social science component (Hill & Helmers, 2004). Therefore, these two functions will serve as the basis of the following essay.

It is known that when images are highly consumed, they can significantly affect those who take great stock in their meaning. Vast compilations of images related to the body are seen in the advertising and marketing sectors and encumber our visual world to aid in the production of gender identities (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). Women are especially bombarded by images that are related to their physical improvement and are subsequently taught to view their bodies in a certain way. Therefore, it is necessary to understand *why* and *how* these images control and shape the worlds and identities of viewers in our society.

Here the nature of the image and photography will be firstly explored in order to bring greater understanding of how these processes work in society. Next, the various ways in which scholars engage images will be explored in order to explain how visuals make arguments, persuade viewers, and affect our lives daily. Finally, these concepts and principals will be related to the topic of body image in

order to aid the reader in a full understanding of how images have exponential capability to influence the lives of girls throughout society.

Nearly two decades ago, over 82 billion photographs were taken daily. This number is presumably higher today as cameras are readily available via personal telephones. This type of exposure creates a “see-all” culture for everyone to interpret and experience (Betts, 2013) and causes images serve as social constructs which can be interpreted in a myriad of ways (Olsen, 2007; Mitchell, 1995). This diversity has causes rhetoricians to pay a substantial amount of attention to issues of visual rhetoric and the narratives we formulate for ourselves to shape our attitudes on various topics (Hill & Helmers, 2004).

Hill and Helmers (2004) define rhetoric broadly “as the uniquely human ability to use symbols to communicate with one another” (p. 42). When thinking about images, it may seem obvious that visual elements persuade and shape our attitudes, beliefs and actions. However, this cannot be assumed until the act of argument is taken into account and fully grasped, since arguments supply us with reasons for accepting a position or viewpoint. When an argument is made, certain positions are deemed true, probable, and plausible. Arguments are also traditionally associated with speech and language (Hill & Helmers, 2004) a mechanism in our society that is not new. Language historically sets the stage for such socially constructed interpretations and like language, images are ever-evolving and a product of theoretical, social, and historical histories. These constructs easily evolve in our society and develop freely throughout. Similarly, images have also

developed freely and created another type of dominate language in our culture—the visual language. People, mass media, and ever-present technological advances control and interpret this language (Perlof, 2014).

Therefore, it is not surprising that images are seen as a tool of power as they can memorialize, furnish evidence, and create an event in itself. As a result, it is equally important to comprehend the position of power the photographer holds. For example, when documenting an event, the photographer views himself as the facilitator poised to capture a fleeting moment. This causes the photographer to position himself in a certain relation to reality, which enables power because the moment is forever captured and memorialized based on his decisions (Sontag, 1977). Consequently, photographs are then highly-valued because they can provide information to those who were not present and allow viewers to take inventory of this “thin slice of space and time” (Sontag, 1977, p. 22).

Twigg (1992) points out that “this relation between the photographer and reality erases the degree to which photographs generate the very reality they claim to discover” (pg. 306) but still cites photography as an art form that allows visuals to move beyond transmitting meaning and actually generate the meanings for our culture that assists in “writing” our reality. Thus, photographic meaning comes from a complex web of signification and makes the act of photography a critical site where the meanings of reality are constantly challenged and destabilized (Twigg, 1992).

It is therefore imperative to understand how scholars who study images engage and understand and interpret these meanings. However, the outlook on images and their relation to our reality differ among disciplines and scholars. It is believed by some that images crave a narrative (Blair, 2012) while others believe photos speak a language of their own and make compulsive arguments without the need for text (Olsen, 2007). This spectrum has resulted in a rich diverse visual rhetoric history, which provides invaluable conceptual resources for analyses of symbolic action (Olsen, 2007).

It is also known that images are often contextualized into broader systems of meaning in visual rhetoric in order to analyze the ways in “which culturally shared values and assumptions are utilized in persuasive communication, and how these shared values and assumptions influence viewers’ responses to mass-produced images” (Hill & Helmers, 2004). Although these examinations and tools are broad, the following will highlight research related to image vernacular in order to provide brief insight to the manner in which youth engage images—especially those viewed in mass media.

Image Vernacular

Image vernacular serves as a middle ground for studying visual elements and grants the observer agency in the viewership and conclusion drawing process. This is also an essential concept to understand when contextualizing the importance of images in the current research.

Image vernacular is defined as an “enthymematic mode of reasoning employed by audiences in the context of specific practices of reading and viewing in visual cultures” (Finnegan, 2005, p. 34) and allows viewers to utilize their own concepts to shape their beliefs on a particular topic (Finnegan, 2005).

Enthymemes are arguments that are not abstract, but bound by context in the everyday experiences in one’s life. This is considered one of the most powerful modes of arguments as the argument is solidified by the viewer and constructed by tapping into overreaching social knowledge. Utilizing these unstated premises, image vernacular by definition relies on this type of argument to allow audiences to navigate through their own visual culture. As explored above, visuals can function like language and “visual culture” recognizes that images frame our experiences and operate as fluidly as language. Viewers not only connected with the photograph but approach photographs in a manner that is accepted and understood in greater realms of society (Finnegan, 2005).

Many visual critics who analyze visual culture suggest that ideologies are the primary driving force in the shaping of beliefs and ideals. On the other hand, one may presume that those viewing images react in an extreme manner. As stated, these vernaculars provide a solid middle ground for visual critics and further prove that utilizing the premise of image vernacular, one can provide true agency to viewers and shed light on contemporary tensions surrounding our world.

In relation to the portrayal of the female body, there is also a great deal of image vernacular. For example, in Jensen’s “The Eating Disordered Lifestyle:

Imagetexts and the Performance of Similitude” (2005) “everyone knows and accepts” the images that are manipulated by the media. In this context, the “vernacular” is the acceptance of the images of women are consistently manipulated in order to perpetuate the fantasy of how women should look. Therefore, the act of “photoshopping” or the vernacular practice of digitally altering images calls for scholarly attention because of the manner in which it facilitates conversations, discourse, and vernacular throughout society (Peck, 2014).

This mainstream acceptance of digital manipulation and gender ideals represent a modern-day example of an image vernacular and will later function as an example to provide context to the following research. Yet, not every individual approaches images in the same manner.

Information Behavior

The concept of information behavior can begin to explain the various ways in which people seek information about their bodies. This dynamic occurs when an individual needs information on a certain topic. This type of need can be motivated by physiological or social reasons but personnel, social and environmental barriers may hinder the information seeking process (Wilson, 1997). For example, this effect can be seen when youth participate in social media interactions. Social media has been viewed as an outlet that can let to “self-perpetuating cycles of influence.” Meaning, youth who may be struggling with their body image will turn to websites and social media in order to discover reassurance and validation. This has been

shown to actually increase body image disturbance since this type of information seeking often results in more negative comparisons thus reinforcing unrealistic body ideals (Perloff, 2014).

In terms of the current study, these processes can often apply information encountered in the mass media. Here the level of intensity of information seeking behavior will vary depending on the abovementioned barriers. However, personality traits often distinguish this level of intensity when seeking information from mass media channels. For example, active seeking behaviors describe goal-driven behaviors that go beyond routine media use and are motivated by factors such as self-expression, tension reduction, and autonomy. To contrast, passive seeking behaviors describe a more “ritual based” behavior and is motivate by identity building, identity reinforcement, and modeling (Kahlor, Dunwoody, Griffin & Neuwirth 2006).

Additionally, in the same manner in which information can be sought, it can also be inhibited and rejected. Information avoidance has been largely studied in the context of health communication but is also applicable to body image research as people also actively and passively avoid information if they perceive that it may cause them psychological discomfort. A common example of this is seen when individuals who have a perceived medical condition choose to reject information from self-discovered means such as the Internet or medical literature, or from professional means such as a physician consolation. Just like the information seeking processes described, the level of intensity of information can vary

depending on motivating factors and the described barriers (Kahlor, Dunwoody, Griffin & Neuwirth 2006).

Here an example of desiring and rejecting body image information can serve as an applicable example for the study at hand. An active information seeker may obtain information from Internet searches and energetic investigations of various body image messaging while a passive information seeker may simply recognize various body image messaging in television shows or commercials that happen to appear during habitual television watching. Additionally, someone who is rejecting information may choose to avoid certain television shows and social media outlets in order to avoid the realization that their body may differ from those exhibited in mass media. This is particularly worthy of note for this study as adolescents have been known to continually seek body image information and are often highly motivated because of physical changes that accompany puberty (Carmona, Tornero-Quiñones, & Sierra-Robles, 2015).

These abovementioned processes and concepts must be carefully considered for this study as visual rhetoric and information seeking processes combined can shed light on the various physiological processes young people experience when obtaining and processes images displayed through mass media channels.

Methodology

This study aims to identify the level of awareness adolescent's hold regarding media imagery and its influence on body image perception. When determining an appropriate approach to answering the research question, the researcher utilized multiple qualitative strategies in addition to a short survey, which was utilized to capture information on body satisfaction, media usage, and demographics from each participant. Youth voice and community based participatory research inspired the methodology utilized in this study—largely Photovoice techniques. This approach was highly appropriate when seeking to understand how adolescent females construct their body image as Photovoice is known for its ability to “perceive the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 372). This methodology is a tool that is easily adapted to a variety of scenarios and has the ability to serve as a mechanism for personal and community change for marginalized and underserved communities (Royce, Parra-Medina, & Messias, 2006; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004).

Bearing this in mind, it is also imperative to understand the inspiration for Photovoice methodologies.

Young people were often historically seen in a negative light, and their achievements and attributes often went unrecognized by adults, since the media and popular opinion commonly portrayed youth as unmotivated and incompetent

(Delgado, 2015). It is also documented that more research and understanding is needed in both disciplines in order to comprehend and improve outcomes for community and youth, in not only practice but in research and policy development (Checkoway, 2011).

Regardless of the historical perspective on youth, this population can be a valuable tool when organizing a community since they have the potential to be engaged in a community for long periods of time (Barnett, & Kumaran, 2012) and can also provide insight to issues that relate to social justice and disparate youth populations (Delgado, 2015; Wang, 2008). This is an important aspect of youth development as youth also have potential to form bonds with adults in their community, which can provide them with positive influences and resources in order to assist them in becoming productive adults (Barnett, & Kumaran, 2012).

Per Checkoway (2011), youth participation is considered a “process of involving young people in situations and decisions that affect their lives” (p. 341). This is especially important as communities are becoming more diverse and can include initiatives that emphasize educational reform, juvenile justice, environmental quality, transportation, school reform, gender and racial equality, and of course, health promotion (Checkoway, 2011; Delgado, 2015).

However, in order to fully grasp the concept of youth participation one must understand its roots—youth voice. Youth development employs a concept called youth voice, which Witt and Caldwell define as an “opportunity for youth to give perspectives on issues” (p. 281) and is found to be successful when youth have

clearly defined roles in assessment, program design, implementation, and evaluation of a program or issue that effects youth (Zeldin, et al., 2014).

Youth voice operates per the understanding that young people are the best advocates for their needs and best understand what youth audiences need and want. Youth programs, organizations, schools, and entire communities utilize youth voice in the form of youth councils, boards, and focus groups in order to receive feedback and direction from the targeted audience (Zeldin et al., 2014). This has been noted with great success as youth feel a sense of belonging and trust when adults seek and employ their ideas (Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2008; Zeldin et al., 2014). Examples of successes are endless as youth become more engaged and motivated to participate in activities where they feel valued and respected (Zeldin et al., 2014).

Photovoice

With these aims in mind, the bulk of the research data in this study was obtained through Photovoice methodology. Photovoice is a type of action research that allows people to identify, represent, and enhance their community through photographic technique (taking and talking about photos) and allows research participants to illustrate or document a specific phenomenon, problem, or topic (Wang & Burris 1997; Berg & Lune, 2004).

Photovoice methodologies offer an ideal method for young people to enhance their community's well-being. Innovative Photovoice projects grounded in youth participation and youth culture have been initiated around the country and the world (Wang, 2008). This method provides a way to bring voice to individuals or populations who are traditionally silenced. The photos and stories generated through Photovoice are used to raise community awareness of an issue, inspire public policy change, advocate for human rights, and even break down stigma and stereotypes for various populations (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004).

The requirements and procedures for this study utilized Wang's (2008) 9 Steps to Effective Photovoice Methodology as a guide. However, slight modifications were implemented in order to effectively fit the theme and sample of this study. These guidelines and changes are outlined in Table 11. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University (IRB# 2014-0805).

Table 11

Photovoice Data Collection Procedures and Modifications

Data Collection Strategy (Wang, 2008)	Elements for Fulfillment (Wang, 2008; p. 149-152)	<i>Researcher Modifications/ Application</i>
PHASE 1		
1. Select and recruit a target audience of policy makers or community leaders <i>(Can be interchanged with 2)</i>	Who has the power to make decisions that can improve the situation? The target audience may include city council members and other politicians, journalists, physicians, administrators, researchers, business people, and community leaders with the power to make and implement participants' recommendations. Youth may could come together first and then decide upon their primary intended audience/s.	<i>Youth were recruited and selected prior to recruitment and selection of target audience.</i>
2. Recruit a group of Photovoice participants (can be interchangeable with 1):	Seven to ten people is an ideal group size. Youth Photovoice participants have been recruited and mobilized through elementary, middle, and high schools, church groups, vocational programs, clinics, and teen centers.	<i>Approximately five youth from each site were utilized in order to aid the researcher with in-depth relationship building. 3 sites were utilized which in summation will total 15 participants.</i>

Table 11 cont.

Data Collection Strategy (Wang, 2008)	Elements for Fulfillment (Wang, 2008; p. 149-152)	<i>Researcher Modifications/ Application</i>
3. Introduce the Photovoice methodology to participants, and facilitate a group discussion about cameras, power, and ethics.	The first workshop begins with an introduction to the Photovoice concept and method. It emphasizes the aim to influence policy makers and community leaders; the responsibility and authority conferred upon the photographer wielding the camera; an ethic of giving photographs back to community people to express thanks; and how to minimize potential risks to youth participants' wellbeing.	<i>I will conducted this step during Session 1 at each site. Since the topic of body image was discussed special considerations were made during the ethics portion of the session. This was in order to ensure youth are considerate and appropriate throughout the photographing process (Appendix B).</i>
4. Obtain informed consent.	One hallmark of Photovoice training is that the first session emphasizes safety and the authority and responsibility that come with using a camera. Facilitators must consider how participants' vulnerability may be further modified by their young age, as well as their social class, access to power (or lack thereof), health concerns, and other factors. Facilitators should explain the written informed consent form, which ought to include a statement of project activities and significance, specific potential risks and benefits, the voluntary nature of participation and freedom to withdraw at any time for any reason, and the understanding that no photographs identifying specific individuals will be released without separate written consent of not only the photographer but also the identified individuals (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). The informed consent of parents or guardians for all minors, as well as youth participants' consent, must be obtained.	<i>All considerations were taken and remain unmodified during application as per the methodology protocol as well as Institutional Review Board standards for research with human subjects. This will take place during the preliminary sessions of the project (Appendix A).</i>

Table 11 cont.

Data Collection Strategy (Wang, 2008)	Elements for Fulfillment (Wang, 2008; p. 149-152)	<i>Researcher Modifications/ Application</i>
PHASE 2		
5. Pose initial theme/s for taking pictures.	Participants may wish to brainstorm together about what themes they can focus upon to enhance community health, and then determine individually what they wish to photograph. Or, given a specific project theme such as violence prevention, participants may discuss ways in which they might portray conditions and factors that contribute to or prevent violence. For subsequent rounds of picture-taking, participants can generate specific, related ways of thinking about what to photograph in terms of open-ended questions.	<i>In order to effectively answer the research questions, youth were interviewed during Session 1 on the topic of Body image and their use of media. Youth were also presented with topics to consider when taking photos as well as guidelines regarding the appropriateness and subject matter of photographs (Appendix B & C).</i>
6. Distribute cameras to participants and review how to use the camera.	Determine what type of camera will be utilized and how to execute the process. For example, if participants will take more than two or three rolls of film, then disposable cameras may be least cost-effective. If participants have a strong interest in using a camera that allows for maximum creative expression, and facilitators are experienced with the medium format Holga, then they may prefer this inexpensive camera that permits multiple exposures so that people can literally layer the meaning of their images.	<i>Although the concept of using special interest cameras is appealing in some Photovoice situations, the topic of body image should be as realistic and genuine as possible. Youth used their personal cell phones to take their photos. I then printed hard copy photographs for the youth to view in the Sharing Circles.</i>
7. Provide time for participants to take pictures	Participants agree to turn in their images to a facilitator for developing and/or enlarging at a specified time, such as one week after the initial workshop, and then to gather again to discuss their photographs.	<i>10 days after Session 1, youth were asked to submit their photos to the researcher (Appendix D).</i>

Table 11 cont.

Data Collection Strategy (Wang, 2008)	Elements for Fulfillment (Wang, 2008; p. 149-152)	<i>Researcher Modifications/ Application</i>
8. Meet to discuss photographs and identify themes.	The next three stages—selecting photographs, contextualizing or storytelling, and codifying issues, themes, or theories—occur during group discussion. First, each participant may be asked to select and talk about one or two photographs that s/he feels is most significant, or simply likes best. Second, participants may frame stories about—and take a critical stance toward—their photographs in terms of questions spelling the mnemonic SHOWeD (see page ___ for question breakdown)	<i>All considerations were taken during each “Sharing Circle” at each site. Youth were asked probing questions specific to body image (Appendix E).</i>
PHASE 3		
9. Plan with participants a format to share photographs and stories with policy makers or community leaders.	Facilitators and participants typically plan a format such as a PowerPoint slide show or an exhibition to amplify participants’ photographs, stories, and recommendations to policy makers and community leaders. For example, some facilitators and participants will organize a slide show and exhibition to be held at the city’s main library where youth and adult participants share their photographs and stories with an audience that may include the mayor, journalists, community leaders, and researchers.	<i>A display will be conducted during session 4 at a yet to be determined location. During the sharing circles the youth aided the researcher in identifying target individuals to invite to this event.</i>

Participants were recruited with the assistance of adult leaders at each location as well as through personal acquaintances. In the case of the Wixon Valley 4-H Club, the club manager was an integral component of recruitment and aided the researcher to make initial contact with the youth. The youth that attend Bryan ISD were recruited by the researcher through previous acquaintances and through a former after-school program leader in the district. The researcher met with participants twice—aside from preliminary sessions that were utilized to recruit and obtain consent. This allowed the researcher to begin to form relationships with the participants as well as continually act as a contributor to the knowledge discovered throughout the data collection process. Multiple meetings were an integral part of the research process so the researcher could begin to establish rapport and trust with participants

Phase 1: Photovoice Introduction and Semi-Structured Interviews

The first session was utilized in order to obtain demographic and media usage information, conduct initial semi-structured interviews with each participant regarding their perceptions on body image, and conduct the photo training session. Interview protocol was designed with the social comparison theory in mind. Questions like “What type of media influences you most,” “How do these images influence how you feel about your body,” and “How do you compare yourself to these images” gave the researcher a foundation for inquiry. During this phase, the researcher also utilized a 7-question survey to capture self-reported data on media consumption, body image satisfaction, and demographics.

Phase 2: Sharing Circles and Project Reflection

Then a second session was utilized for youth to view, discuss, and process their photos in “sharing circles.” The concept of sharing circles was inspired by previously conducted research about indigenous populations. This concept was first created in order to bring forward worldviews that can bridge western practices and the knowledge of indigenous populations. The sharing circles allow participants to capture people’s experiences and are comparable to focus groups. However, the sharing circles are utilized as not only an information-sharing venue but as a platform to formulate knowledge and include healing (Lavallee, 2009). In this case, sharing circles were appropriate because youth were able to divulge their insecurities and emotional turmoil associated with their body image concerns in a group of like-minded peers. Youth were also asked to reflect on the entire Photovoice process at the conclusion of each sharing circle to bring the reflection process to a close.

Phase 3: Community Outreach

A third session is to be held for youth to display photos and findings to community members and stakeholders. This phase is also crucial to fulfilling the elements of community-based research. This session is scheduled for a later date and will allow all youth to come together to display their photos and finalize the process with girls from all three sites.

Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was deductive as it utilized the social comparison theory as a lens to view data. Interviews and sharing circles were analyzed thematically utilizing the constant comparative method while guided by

the interpretations of the participants. This approach allowed the researcher to gain the trust of the participants and generate theoretical ideas that support and inform the research question (Glaser, 1965). Data from interview transcripts were coded into themes. New data and codes were compared with not only data from individuals but with those from all three sites and across all coding categories. Over 40 categories emerged from this process. Additionally, Collier's (1986) direct and indirect analysis was utilized to evaluate the photographs.

Building Quality Into The Study

Various verification strategies were utilized to ensure trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is comprised of four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Credibility was achieved through constant reflexivity in order to ensure that the themes accurately depicted the experience of the participant and by allowing participants to give feedback on their semi-structured interview transcripts--also known as member checking. Transferability was achieved in this study by obtaining a purposeful sample from multiple and diverse sites. The sample chosen aimed to allow the reader to make a connection between this data and other contexts. Dependability, was achieved in this study by establishing an audit trail of all coded data. Finally, conformability was achieved by conducting peer-debriefings with faculty members. Peer debriefing is also known as analytic triangulation and is achieved when disinterested peers are engaged in data interpretation process. Here, this was accomplished by soliciting feedback from two faculty members from the coded data, in order to ensure the

thematic analysis was understandable and well interpreted (Creswell, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Ethical Considerations

In order to fully position body image research at the forefront of community change, it is integral that the populations who served as participants in the current study were critically examined. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic (body image) and the sensitivity of the chosen population (youth) it was also important to exercise proper ethical considerations related to youth and the various cultural groups studied. Throughout the study the researcher remained sensitive to these issues and engaged procedural and situational ethics to ensure that as a human instrument, cautious and responsible behaviors were exhibited.

Furthermore, researchers must remain constantly aware of the balances between communities, youth, and the research. Although procedural ethics are a given, procedures do not always account for the abovementioned considerations. Therefore, the following “best practices,” developed by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) are recommended in order to ensure that the proper attention is paid to the expected emotional and cognitive processes for youth populations. However slight modifications were implemented in order to effectively fit the theme and data collection process for this study. These guidelines and changes are outlined in Table 12.

Table 12

Photovoice Ethical Considerations and Modifications

Ethical “Best Practices” (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001)	Researcher Fulfillment
Provide and review with participants a consent form.	A parent consent form was utilized and approved by Texas A&M’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix F). Also, a minor assent form was utilized and approved by Texas A&M’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix G).
Provide an “Acknowledgment and Release” consent form on which participants obtain the signatures of the people they photograph,	Youth were instructed during the photo training to only photograph herself or those participating in the project to ensure that photograph releases were obtain for anyone photographed.
Frame the first training around a group discussion about the use of cameras, power, and ethics, emphasizing safety and the authority and responsibility that come with using a camera	Appendix C
Provide written material (such as a brochure that describes the goals of the Photovoice project, who will participate, how photographs will be used, and whom to contact for more information) that participants can give to subjects or interested community members.	Appendix C, F and H.
Provide a letter for youth or adult participants to give teachers and school principals or employers as applicable regarding the goal and duration of the project and establish whether and how cameras will be used at school or work.	Youth were instructed to not take photos during times that would be disruptive to school and work activities. Since each site was unique the need to inform others of the project was minimal.
Provide participants with prints to give back to people they have photographed.	Youth were returned the photos after proper data analysis procedures.
Provide and review with participants a consent form indicating permission to publish any photographs, or only specified photographs, to promote project goals, regardless of whether required by the facilitators’ sponsoring institution.	Appendix F and H.
Mentor project staff and participants on the ethical principles and actions underlying Photovoice.	No staff were utilized for this project. However youth were informed of ethical considerations during the photograph training (Appendix C).

The second dimension, situational ethics was equally important to consider. This is especially imperative, when working with youth populations, as youth are a frequently marginalized population. The Photovoice assignments required conceptual thinking and introspection by the youth. These processes may have been challenging to their cognitive development and hinder possible empowerment (Royce, Parra-Medina, & Messias, 2006). Therefore, it was imperative that the youth voices were truly heard and that the researcher allowed youth to have power in the process. This not only increased youth autonomy but the research's authenticity as whole (Fournier et al., 2014).

Sample

Since Photovoice is a participatory action research strategy that can contribute to youth mobilization for community change, it is important to allow youth to “record and vivify their community’s strengths and concerns” and “promote critical dialogue and knowledge about community issues through group discussion of photographs” (Wang, 2008, p. 147). Therefore, 15 adolescent females from these entities within the Brazos County were sampled in order to provide valuable, diverse information regarding body image within the same community. To be considered for the study, youth had to be female between the ages of 11 and 14 years old and reside in Brazos County. Youth also had to attend one of the abovementioned entities.

The mean age of the adolescents was 13 years old. The ethnic breakdown was 46.6% White (N=7), 26.6% Latin/Hispanic (N=4), and 33.3% African American/Black (N=5). It is also notable to highlight that the sample included two sets of identical twins from both the Wixon Valley 4-H Club and the Lincoln Recreation Center. Additionally, one set of twins also had a younger sister in the sample. This information is summarized in Table 13.

Table 13

Sample Demographics by Individual

#	Youth	Age	Race	Site Location
1	Holly ¹	13	White	Wixon Valley 4-H Club
2	Kate	14	White	
3	Anna ¹	13	White	
4	Julie	13	White	
5	Avery	13	White	
6	Annabelle	14	Latin/Hispanic	Bryan Independent School District
7	Yvie	13	White	
8	Paula	13	Latin/Hispanic	
9	Callie	13	White	
10	Isabelle	14	African American & Latin Hispanic	
11	Grace	14	Latin/Hispanic	Lincoln Recreation Center
12	Aaliyah	11	African American	
13	Kelsey ^{2 3}	13	African American	
14	Kim ^{2 3}	13	African American	
15	Layla ³	11	African American	

Note¹: Participants are sisters and identical twins.

Note²: Participants are sisters and identical twins.

Note³: Participants are sisters.

FINDINGS

This study aimed to identify the level of awareness adolescents possess regarding media imagery and its influence on body image perception. Data were collected from 15 semi-structured interviews, three sharing circles, and 219 photographs.

Based on these findings three themes regarding participant's understanding of the media in relation to body image: the effects seen on social media outlets, music, and television. However, in order to properly situate these findings it is important to also understand how participants understood body image, one must first understate the interpretations of body image, media consumption, and perceived body image satisfaction.

Body Image and Media Consumption

Adolescent Female Interpretations of Body Image

In order for youth to begin to understand how the media influences their body image, it was of utmost importance for participants to begin conceptualizing body image. As stated, participants were allowed to construct their own meanings of body image. Initially, most participants stated they were unsure of how to explain this abstract concept. To remedy this, the researcher gave an operational definition of body image for participants to consider when thinking about body image issues and taking their photographs. This definition was, “the mental picture you have of your body plus your thoughts and feelings about this picture.” However participants were also encouraged to formulate their own understandings of body image and to consider their daily lives when taking photos and talking

about their experiences. Additionally, Photovoice methodologies aided participants in understanding and displaying their constructions of body image. These constructions were at times broad as participants utilized ideals related to happiness, beauty, health, and weight when constructing their definition of body image.

Many participants factored in overall happiness and perceived beauty when explaining body image, “Most of these [photos] I thought my hair looked good that day, it made me feel pretty and good about myself,” said Callie. This idea was continually echoed when discussing the photos as Isabelle said, “These photos make me happy, and it makes me realize I look pretty.”

The idea of looking and feeling “pretty” was a common theme throughout the process as youth equated “good body image” with looking and feeling “pretty.” Yvie said, “I don’t know why I took this, I just feel pretty in it.” Isabelle described her mindset when taking one photo, “It was a beautiful day outside and it was good lighting. And we were bored. I took it for my body image and I thought I looked really pretty that day, I was getting all dressed up to go somewhere and see my bae.”

Additionally, participant’s construction of body image was associated with health. Most associations were drawn between eating right, being “fit,” and having positive body image. When explaining the ideal body image Isabelle said, “fit and healthy because it’s good for your health verses weight so you can live longer.”

Grace agreed by saying, “health class taught me you can get diseases if you don’t stay healthy.”

Nevertheless, many participants who cited health as an important factor also associated weight and size with being healthy. Grace said, “I know how to control it [weight]. Eat right, get on the runner, and be active. I always want to stay underweight for my 15 because last time I went for my dress it fit perfectly.” Anna cited healthy eating by saying “I feel lucky because there’s a lot of people at our school who are big and don’t get good meals and stuff.”

The concept of size was also emulated in discussion about being “skinny” this term was utilized many times throughout the data collection process. This verbiage was also commonly utilized when describing the ideal body. Holly said, “I always think like ‘why I can’t I be that skinny or be that person that starts a trend.’”

Regardless, participants did recognize that being unique and having a body that is capable of certain abilities as a positive attribute. This was mainly expressed when discussing athleticism. Avery even spoke about rejecting the thin ideal because of these reasons, “some girls at school are crazy skinny and sometimes I wish I could be like that but sometimes I’m glad because I couldn’t do sports because I’d be too weak and wimpy.”

Although participants cited an “ideal body” with ridged constructions, further discussions eventually led to the idea of acceptance and individualism in regards to body image formation. When asked about the ideal body Kate answered, “I don’t know, it doesn’t really matter does it? Who you are is who you

are.” Annabelle expanded, “My family all has different sizes and they always tell me to be happy who I am because I’m only one person.” Finally, Grace summarized this concept by stating, “I don’t think there’s an ideal body; if you feel good in how you look, that’s you.”

Along the same lines, participants were quick to cite the attributes of individualism and overall acceptance when discussing body image. Annabelle illustrated this idea, “the way you’re supposed to be, like some girls are meant to be like big and some girls are normal and some girls are really, really skinny.”

It is apparent that through this process youth began to comprehend various forms of body image understandings. These understandings were also able to shed light on body image satisfaction levels for participants.

Body Image Satisfaction

As stated, further analysis is desired in order to properly understand how participants position themselves in relation to body image and the media. Surprisingly, quantitative results indicated that all participants were satisfied with their bodies. Based on survey data, 53.3% (N=8) of participants reported their body satisfaction as somewhat satisfied while 46.6% (N=7) of participants reported their current body satisfaction as very satisfied.

This perceived satisfaction was further explained during the semi-structured interviews and sharing circles. When asked about the feelings they have about their bodies Callie who reported she was “somewhat satisfied” with her body also revealed the struggles she’s had in finding this satisfaction, “I was in a state of

depression for like 5 months because I didn't want to eat anything and I'm just now learning in 2015 that I can't worry about what other people say."

While overall participants voiced the importance of self-acceptance and empowerment, they did claim to feel unsatisfied with their bodies at various times. This was noted when discussing being around others at school and in situations that forced the youth to be more aware of their bodies. Holly noted that being conscious of various bodies caused a heightened sense of awareness and dissatisfaction, "sometimes I feel embarrassed because I'm not the same as them [popular girls]...it's the only thing I think about in the locker room." Anna even recognized that these comparisons caused her to think about her body image more than usual, "I feel good about my body when I don't think about it or compare myself."

When asked about feelings toward their bodies Anna who reported she was "very satisfied" with her body also indicated that this satisfaction only exists because of her current weight status, "I don't like to get above a certain weight besides that, I don't really care. It's because I don't want to get above average for my height because I'm short."

Nevertheless, most participants were satisfied with their bodies and did not claim any body image dissatisfaction but instead stated the importance of self-acceptance. Paula illustrated this, "I don't have no feelings about my body. I don't worry about what I look like because everyone should respect how they look, they don't have to worry about other people." This was echoed by Annabelle who said, "I really don't care what other people think, I just think you should be you."

This initial data indicates that participants did not consider achieving appearance ideals as the most important attribute to idealize. Kate even emphasized the fact that appearance and body related issues should not be a priority in their lives, “A lot of girls focus on how they look and don’t focus on their grades as much as how their looks and hair and stuff.”

Many also viewed the rejection of appearance related activities such as wearing a lot of make-up or worrying about their hair as a statement against those who were, in their minds, overly concerned with their body image. For example, many claimed that by not conforming to the “popular girls,” made a statement about their level of happiness and satisfaction with their bodies. Avery said, “sometimes I need to fix my hair and stuff but people like me for who I am and I don’t really care.” Kate agreed as she said, “I can show up in jeans and a raggedy t-shirt and be fine. I really don’t care.”

These ideas were reverberated as youth produced photos such as those in Figure 25, and commentary related to school and homework. Julie stated the importance of rejecting appearance related goals and focusing on other activities:

“I’m ahead in Spanish and Math. Being smart isn’t weird, when you get older those stupid people are going to be janitors or marry someone rich. When people figure out that I’m smart it makes you feel good. Pretty people aren’t dumb but sometimes they are; I tend to equate pretty with stupid.”

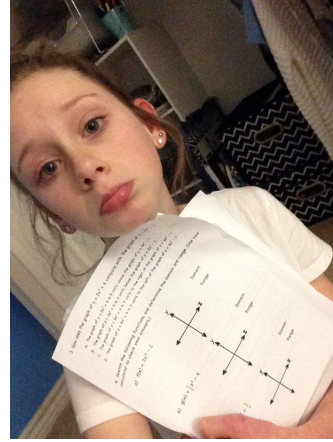
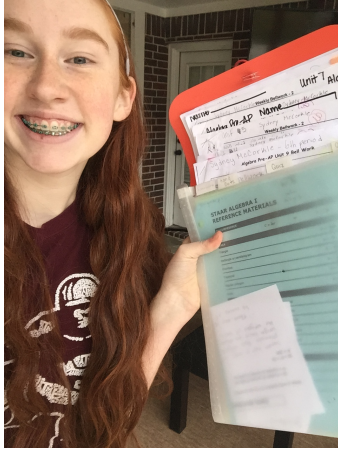


Figure 25. Selfies of Participants With Homework

Although these themes appear in some ways to stray away from firm definitions of “body image” youth continually equated body image to various facets in their daily lives. These perspectives are necessary to consider when exploring how mass media intervenes and influences body image.

Media Consumption

During an average week, participants reported spending 6.56 hours watching television, .22 hours reading magazines, and 4.05 hours on social media outlets. Based on this information it becomes evident that the participants are the highest consumers of television and social media. Additionally, 12 youth cited never reading magazines. The amount of consumption for these three outlets did however vary by site. These differences are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14

Media Consumption by Site Location

Site	Average Number of Hours Watching Television Weekly	Average Number of Hours Reading Magazines Weekly	Average Number of Hours on Social Media Outlets Weekly
Wixon Valley 4-H Club	7.80	.20	4.55
Bryan ISD	3.75	.25	7.60
Lincoln Recreation Center	8.13	.20	0.00
Total	6.56	.22	4.05

Regardless, youth did indicate that the media plays a role in their daily lives and in regards to their body image formation. Although youth mostly felt satisfied with their bodies they did assert that the media influenced them in various ways. Social media outlets, music, and television were themes most cited in regards to these influences.

Social Media

Social media was one media type that played a clear role in the daily lives of participants. One caveat to this was the adolescent females at the Lincoln Recreation Center, who were not permitted to participate in social media because of safety reasons expressed to them by their parents. Those with access most often mentioned the photo-sharing network, Instagram when discussing social media consumption. Participants also mentioned the use of SnapChat, Facebook, Vine, and Twitter when mentioning social media outlets. Participants explained the

importance of receiving feedback from “friends” on the network as well as expressed an understanding of the photo editing and selection techniques employed by many site users. Additionally, youth discussed celebrities who promote body image satisfaction and acceptance through social media outlets.

Importance of Feedback from Others

Participants who were active on social media sites cited the importance of gaining positive feedback from others when considering their body image. Kate explained, “if you post a selfie on Instagram and someone puts an emoji on it, that makes you feel good.”

In keeping with the aforementioned constructions of body image, the act of taking selfies was also a factor as Paula cited the motivation for taking selfies was to gain this positive feedback from others:

“You know how selfies you are taking like 50 pics and then you pick the perfect one. That’s why we take the selfies because we want to post them so everyone says ‘you look cute today’ and stuff.”

This type of feedback was appeared to be important factor to participants in order for them to achieve complete body image satisfaction. However, photos were also scrutinized closely during the process.

Photo Editing

In regards to photos seen on social media sites, youth did appear to have a firm understanding of the various photo-editing effects that take place on social media sites and realized these images were likely unattainable. Avery said, “social media is different, people on there look nice but you can tell they are photoshopped

to look skinny.” Julie then stated, “The girls on the Internet are obviously fake and you know they are so many filters on them.”

The knowledge and understand youth have regarding photo editing did not, keep youth from partaking in various editing techniques. Although editing photos was not restricted throughout this project, the researcher did not promote the practice. Regardless, one youth stated during the photo training that she never shows anyone a photo without some sort of editing. In keeping with this thought, 67 of the 219 photos appeared to be edited or enhanced with text, effects, and photo filters. This practice was cited by Callie as a form of entertainment, “Well I picked most of these because I like editing and putting a lot of stuff on them.”

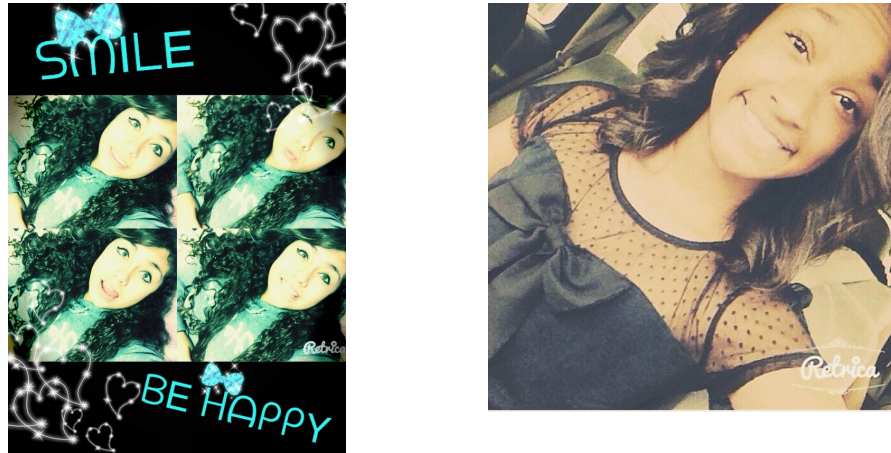


Figure 26. Example of Edited Photos From Participants

Callie even boasted that her photos were only submitted to the researcher because of the editing that took place, “Well I picked most of these because I like editing and putting a lot of stuff on them, because whenever I take selfies I feel more confident about myself because I think I look prettier.”

Here, youth appear to be critical of their photos and choose to utilize these editing techniques to enhance the photographs intended for social media. This type of self-criticism was not just in relation to the photographs themselves but also linked to the selection process of the photographs.

Self-selection of Photos

The astringent selection of photos was discussed on multiple occasions as participants also expressed the reasoning and selection process for choosing photos to post on social media sites. Many repeated that the process of taking multiple

photos as the norm because since the photo that was ultimately chosen has to achieve certain appearance related standards in order to share with others. Yvie explains this process, “I take pictures of things that I like to do I guess. Just like the process of taking them, it’s like you take 100 of them and you only pick one.” Yvie further explained this selection of photos stating that she wanted to choose the right one to properly exhibit her identity to others, “Yeah like you pick the one you feel more comfortable...its more you.”

Callie, who had articulated struggles with her body image in previous months, said she avoided posting photos because the criticism was difficult enough in “real-life” and recognized that it would be magnified on social media:

“I try and stay as closed in as possible with the stuff I post and say so I don’t get judged since that has happened to me before and in real life and I don’t want that to happen to me on the internet too because that would be even worse.”

As the project continued, she seemed to base her decisions on whether to post a photo on the message she wanted to send at the time. This message, to her, would portray and further solidify the identity she wished to project. In one example, she championed the fact that she was not wearing make-up and wanted those in her social media network to know she was embracing her own beauty:

“It doesn’t matter, no body’s perfect and it’s a good thing. You should let yourself, if you want to take pictures of yourself doing things. I posted that too, I don’t care what other people think and I’m confident about myself.”

Social media was also a way for youth to gain access to other types of youth, celebrities, and individuals in the limelight.

Social Media Celebrities

The type of empowerment described by Callie was an intriguing topic as the researcher continued to understand where these messages of empowerment originate. When interviewing the Bryan ISD girls, it was clear to me that the youth were very involved in following of Internet celebrities who disseminate positive body image messages. One celebrity group mentioned was a group of boys who have created a clothing line for both boys and girls at Aeropostale—a popular clothing store. The clothing line, “United XXVI” was seen as an outlet for empowerment and positive body image. When asked to relate these messages to body image Paula exclaimed, “They got so much body image.... like good body image” while Isabelle explained further, “These guys had their own clothing line at Aeropostale and wanted people to be united and to know they should all love each other. It’s all boys but they get girls to model their clothes.”

As the conversation went on, Callie then began to mention other boys who have become famous via social media because of their messages about body image. One example was “Weekly Chris” who gives weekly pep talks to girls regarding their body image:

“Regular boys only want one kind of girl, and all of those boys like “Weekly Chris” they know that you are beautiful and they want you to feel loved and they want to send that love back and that you’re beautiful the way you.”

“I think when they [internet celebrities got famous they realized different types of girls [all sizes] they had to think about it and be like ‘we have all these different kind of girls and we have to be respectful to them for who they are.’ I think it means more coming from boys so girls.”

Callie and Isabelle even traveled together during the ten day period to visit two Internet celebrities who became famous on the video sharing website, Vine. The youth expressed that they wanted to share these photos with me as well but cited the restrictions of the research project as reasons they could not.



Figure 27. Callie and Isabelle Traveling to visit Vine Celebrities

These results are evidence that social media can be a solid of outlet for identity and self-expression—especially related to body image. Nevertheless, it appears this outlet is strongly reliant on peer-feedback and self-selection of photographs and messages exhibited on various sites and from various individuals.

Music

Much like social media, music was cited as an unwavering aspect in the daily lives of participants. In all contexts, music was viewed as an empowerment tool for positive body image. Youth cited both listening to uplifting music and in some cases, *singing* inspirational music as a way to promote and reinforce positive body image.

Empowering Music

Participants mostly focused on the lyrics and meanings behind various songs when discussing its relation to body image. Isabelle explained one song to me, “there’s a song about loving yourself and you’re you so be you. I love those songs that make you want to embrace who you are.”

Additionally, participants drew connections between various artists, songs, and bands with this type of empowering music. Callie spoke about her favorite band, “Coldplay is a band I really love, it makes me feel good about myself.” Isabelle continued to explain by citing specific songs and artists, “Beautiful by Cristiana Aguilera. There’s a song about loving yourself and you’re you so be you. I love those songs that make you want to embrace who you are.”

Participants continually cited positive, uplifting music—even those specific to body image as noted by Anna, “ like that song ‘all about that base,’ it doesn’t matter if you’re fat and you don’t want to be photoshopped.”

To the participants this type empowerment was not limited to simply listening to the music as many noted their love and passion for singing as well.

Singing as a Empowerment Tool

Participants mentioned singing as a way to empower not only themselves but also others. Callie articulated this during interviews when adding commentary to Figure 28:

“There was a picture with me and a microphone because my passion is singing and I’m obsessed with music. I want to be one of the people that inspires people. And that’s the music I listen to. And I sing that kind of stuff and it makes me feel great about my body image when I sing.”



Figure 28. Callie With Her Microphone

When asked if anything was missing from the photos during the sharing circles, Grace realized her attachment to music and noted that she should have included it in her photographs— like many of the other girls. Following this realization, she proceeded to play the song “Try” by Colbie Caillat which became a topic of discussion for the entire group, “I’m looking all these pictures and I need

my ear buds. I like music and to sing at church and in 15s. I like some types of songs that are like, saying stuff about me. I got the song, you wanna hear it?"

All in all, these results show that music possesses inspiring qualities that youth utilize in not only playing music but also sharing music. These qualities are actively sought out by youth in the forms of specific songs and artists. For these girls, music promotes empowerment, self-acceptance, and in certain cases, positive body image. Additionally, youth discussed that although listening to music is important and has empowering qualities, sharing these messages via singing allows them to not only collect these messages themselves but also empower others through the process.

Television

This clear positivity became fuzzier for the participants as they began to discuss the role of actresses viewed on television and in movies. Bearing in mind that youth, watch an average of approximately 6 hours of television each week the variety of television shows mentioned was expected. Many of the participants listed various reality shows such as a The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills, House of Diane Von Ferstenburg, Scared Straight, and Project Runway as shows they watched regularly. Others mentioned television dramas such as Vampire Diaries and Once Upon a Time as favorites.

Through these shows, participants noted that they frequently acknowledged the beauty and body shapes of various actresses. Participants also recognized that those in the public light are sometimes not the most admirable role models or the

most realistic targets for comparison. They also were quick to recognize the facade that television portrays and were able to distinguish those on television from their daily lives. To the participants, it was not important to want to look like a certain celebrity or character if they did not exhibit desirable behaviors in real-life and on screen.

Comparison to Television Characters, Actresses, and Reality Stars

Participants recognized that actresses were often targets for comparison in regards to body image, but often related this type of comparison to other peers at school rather than to themselves. Annabelle exemplified this when she said, “I think every girl wants to be the perfect shape because of the actresses out there and girls are influenced by that. They are so perfect and it makes girls want to be them.” She continued, ““It shows all the reasons a lot of girls want to be like other people. Because a lot of girls all they do is want to be someone they’re not to impress other people.”

Nevertheless, participants also sought to relate the lives of the characters seen on television to their own lives. Yvie said, “you know you see other girls on there. You see the pretty girls wan you want to be like them. They influence you in a way that you might not know. Cause like, everyone that you watch, you’re trying to make them into your life.” This was echoed by Paula who explained, “You try to see how you’re similar. You see how their character’s life is. You see how they act and how you act. Like I see shirts I have and jeans and I have them at home.”

Beyond clothing comparisons, participants looked to the television for information about role models and behavior as well.

Positive Role Models

Participants felt that celebrities worth idolizing must have inner and outer beauty. Very few mentions were made regarding specific aspects of beauty in regards to celebrities. Nevertheless, celebrities such as Jennifer Lawrence, Taylor Swift, and Ariana Grande were considered beautiful but only because of their actions in real-life contexts. Although comparisons were employed, participants were quick to share that only *certain* characters and actresses are worthy of comparisons. For example, Yvie noted that certain actresses such as Jennifer Lawrence serve as positive role models for multiple reasons associated with not only body image but also behaviors exhibited in “real life”:

“I like Jennifer Lawrence She’s pretty and a good actor but I’ve never hear anything and about her—same with Taylor Swift. Other stars like Miley changed too much. She’s ugly and get too much attention and she’s inappropriate. Most of the time you try and relate with their character not who they are in real life. There are flaws like they are too perfect and you can’t relate to that.”

Paula added, “I want to look like those people on TV. I want to be perfect like Ariana Grande or Jennifer Lawrence. They don’t do nothing bad, they don’t put people down.” Participants were also quick to recognize that behavior exhibited by characters was not always honorable as Paula added, “I just don’t want to be like a duplicate of them [television characters]. I judge people too on TV. In some novellas they are like wanna-bes and there’s a girl that’s her servants.” To illustrate this concept Yvie explained, “Sometimes there’s these girls in movies that are

based on girls bullying people; there's a skinny girl in a movie and they bully someone because she's bigger and different and that's not right to do.”

These examples exhibit the fact that participants had a firm grasp of honorable qualities beyond those related to appearance. To the participants, if a celebrity or character on television did not have inner-beauty, their physical attributes were unimportant and not worthy of idolization.

Realistic Portrayals

Participants also understood that those seen on television are not always portrayed in a realistic manner. Kate even recognized that characters who are supposed to be portrayed as “ugly” were still considered beautiful in a real-life context, “Characters are supposed to be ugly but even then they really aren't. Like in Law and Order this girl was supposed to be nerdy then she went to rehab and came back without her glasses and was really pretty.”

This example displays that participants were likely approaching television characters with realistic expectations as they recognized that distant targets in the media portrayed certain standards of beauty that was likely unattainable in real life contexts.

All in all, participants indicated they were satisfied with their bodies in some capacity—either answering somewhat satisfied or very satisfied on their self-reported survey. This path to satisfaction was not always clear as participants discussed how they continually navigate their way through activities on social media, considering messages enclosed in music and in singing, and comprehending the messages from television characters and actresses. Together these results provide important insights to the level of awareness adolescent's hold regarding media imagery and its influence on body image perception.

Discussion

In this study, body image formation was confirmed as a multidimensional and complex concept (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Shea, 2012). Youth spoke of the various media outlets and the various dimensions utilized to formulate body image. Overall, youth had positive body images but did note that this formation was not without struggles and external influences such as mass media and feedback from those within their social world. Three forms of media were discovered in the thematic analysis: social media, music, and television.

All three of these channels revealed a different experience for the youth. Their experience with music was overwhelmingly positive as youth utilized music to solidify and uplift their positive body image formations while social media proved to be a pervasive transmitter for positive feedback and identity formation for the girls. However, the effect of social media was not as clear-cut as music due to the fact that youth still sought feedback from their network and were ridged in their standards when posting photos of themselves to social media sites. Additionally, the effects of television—the most consumed form of media in this study—was not overwhelmingly clear as youth continually utilized language and displayed media influence despite claiming to ignore these pressures. Youth still chose to somewhat idealize certain characters and celebrities while still considering multiple perspectives (personality, real-life behavior, etc.) when forming an opinion about their worth.

This was not the case with music as youth sought out certain types of music to increase the amount of positive messages in their lives. This indicates that youth are highly aware of the images and messages that can influence them in a negative way and are choosing to surround themselves with messages that will confirm their already positive body image attitudes.

Regardless, youth were still influenced by media in ways they did not recognize. This effect was seen in the photographs the youth submitted. In many cases media narratives regarding beauty and body shape influenced the girls. As noted, the girls often chose photographs that were edited and highlighted certain features. For example, many of the photos show the girls holding the camera in a certain way to highlight their eyes and brighten their facial features. As discussed the “traditional” selfie was submitted several times by all girls from all site locations. The posture and angle of the camera mirror the overreaching discourse seen by media celebrities in the selfies they post to social media sites. For the girls, these photos were often taken while the girls were wearing make-up, had immaculate hair, and dressed fashionably. Although they often noted not caring about these types of appearance related ideals, the media was a likely contributor to these types of photographs as celebrities such as Kim Kardashian often post similar photographs on social media sites. In other instances, the girls stood and posed themselves in a way that reflect another dominant media discourse—highly feminized women. Although the girls recognized that women should be embraced not matter what size she is, photos with their hands on their hips, emphasizing their

bodies and waistlines show that these youth were not impervious to photographs displayed in mass media.

In a broader scope, these insights are important when considering these findings, as it is clear that adolescent females conceptualize body image in many ways. These interpretations of body image are much like those observed by Holmqvist and Frisen (2012) who discovered youth possess a wide and flexible definition of beauty and attractiveness. Additionally, adolescent females in this study appear to be in accordance with previous research, which found that body image and its construction is not static and can fluctuate day-to-day (Cash, 2004; Shea, 2012). In this study, youth continually utilized multidimensional definitions and concepts to frequently understand, explain, and analyze their body image.

Overall, this is unsurprising as youth development scholarship explains that adolescence can be a turbulent time for identity formation and understanding (Witt & Caldwell, 2005; Markey, 2010). Body image is not an exception as studies have also shown that this type of uncertainty is characteristic for this stage of youth development (Grab, Ward, & Hyde, 2008).

To illustrate, participants were at times conflicted with their body image satisfaction status, which is most likely a result of the spectrum between acceptance and rejection of the dominant body discourse seen in the media discussed above. Shea (2012) observed this conflict when youth were striving to define health as well as understand the Western ideal of body image. Although current survey data indicated participants were satisfied with their body image in some capacity,

interview data highlighted that this satisfaction was not always seamless. This is in keeping with previous findings that have shown adolescent females become more dissatisfied with their bodies between middle school and high school (Bucchianeri et al., 2013), and confirms that this type of dissatisfaction is beginning to emerge for this group.

Nevertheless, youth did appear to have a firm knowledge of the ways in which images of the body are manipulated and approached mass media with that realization. Therefore, the positive aspects of the concept of image vernacular is likely present as this type of realization can aid in the development and solidification of positive body image, thus reducing the pervasive effects of mass media (Jensen, 2005). This effect is likely taking place with the current population, as examples of reality and photo editing, and dominant media discourses were prevalent throughout the data. Additionally, although youth recognized that many images were edited and manipulated, the need to portray certain standards still existed as they chose to participate in photo editing practices themselves by adding filters and effects to their photos. Additionally, youth portrayed in their photos the very individuals they claimed to reject which may indicate that youth although aware of societal standards, still unconsciously wish to depict themselves in a manner that displayed their beauty in a social acceptable light. Therefore, the effects of the media are still in question as youth exhibited variations in these understandings at different times and across various forms of media.

This study also sheds light on the narratives that surround body image formation in relation to the media. These stories are crucial to understanding the lived experiences of this population. But, more research is needed in regards to the long-lasting effects of the media instead of its momentary effects (Cash & Smolak, 2011). It is suggested that future research include more experimental and longitudinal studies to identify the cumulative effects and variables that contribute to body image formation in regards to various mass media channels. Additionally, since the topic of social media is relatively new, it is important to add to the literature on social media as there has been “relatively little theoretically-driven research on processes and effects of social media on young women’s body image and self-perceptions” (Perlof, 2014 p. 363).

It is also necessary to consider future research based on these findings. The concept of body image needs to be explored further in order to continue to understand how adolescent females are affected by the media in an ever-changing world. Expanded research methods are needed to confirm and expand on these findings in order to further outline mass media effects and body image conceptualizations. This research is needed on not only the female population but also the lesser-researched adolescent males in order to understand how Western ideals perpetuate male standards. Additionally, to fully understand these processes it is necessary to employ longitudinal perspective data to understand the patterns of development and highlight possible causal relationships between youth and mass media channels. In regards to the population studied it is also necessary to continue

to understand how various ethnic groups experience mass media in a more in-depth manner.

Nevertheless, these results are helpful when considering interventions that target adolescent females. Many prevention programs are based on communication theory and focus on media literacy. For practitioners, these results lend great insights to the ways adolescent females think about their bodies and beauty ideals. These insights will aid in assisting practitioners with reaching and communicating with youth about these issues. Furthermore, these results indicate that youth are taking other factors into consideration when formulating their body image. Therefore, on a larger scale it is necessary for youth to continue to be engaged by positive role models and youth programs in order to continue to expose young people to positive influences.

Limitations

The purposeful nature of the sample must be deliberated when considering limitations to the research study. The data collection process will be stringent but the very nature of studying a core group of individuals regarding their personal feelings about their body image could have skewed results. Additionally, the fact that the sample contained two sets of identical twins one would presume that their media usage and sociocultural influences are quite similar. This serves as a limitation due to the fact that it makes the sample more heterogeneous.

In regards to media usage, this study did not assess whether youth had been exposed to any type of media literacy or body image interventions at home or

school. Therefore, it is unknown where and how youth obtained their positive body images.

Furthermore, the Photovoice method itself lends to the necessary notation of limitations. Although this methodology combines research, activism, and participation from research subjects, this data alone is not sufficient to raise the amount of community awareness needed to inspire long-term sustainable change. Furthermore, when allowing youth to create the content needed to analyze the data (photographs) the researcher must relinquish a certain amount of control when it comes to upholding proper photography principals. Although youth were trained, the nature of armature photography allows for a focal point or necessary aspect of a photo to be lost; and although the interview process will helped to negate this effect, this is still considered a limitation.

Conclusions

This study was designed to identify the level of awareness adolescents hold regarding media imagery and its influence on body image perception. Since it is known that a sizeable body of research has studied this concept, it was important to not only utilize new methodologies to understand these effects, but also continue to understand the lives of an age group that experiences the continual hardships during their transition into adulthood.

Overall, youth in this study exemplified the challenges and struggles experienced in adolescence regarding body image. The current findings add to the understandings of various mass media outlets and their effect on body image

construction. All youth in this study claimed to be satisfied with their body image and discussed the challenges, negotiations, and processes that aided them in finding body image satisfaction. This is refreshing as a great deal of body image literature focuses on body-dissatisfied individuals.

It is known that society often perpetuates unrealistic standards for women and their bodies. It is also known that youth who have emerged into adolescence during the digital revolution have been exposed to a great deal of these images. This is especially true as many youth participate in new forms of media such as social networking sites. These sites often serve to perpetuate the unrealistic standard of beauty and bodies. Therefore, it was important to understand the role body image has in perpetuating and contributing body image in order to effectively design prevention efforts aimed to support and inspire healthy behaviors for adolescents. However, the youth in this study negotiated their way through mass media messages in many ways and highlighted these experiences. The ideas and implications presented throughout this study aid in shedding a much-needed light on the lived-experiences of youth in regards to the media and the formation of their body image for not only researchers but practitioners in the field who work with youth daily.

CHAPTER V

BUT FIRST, LET ME TAKE A SELFIE: UTILIZING SELF-CONCEPTS TO EXPLORE SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES ON BODY IMAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL COMPARISON PROCESSES

Introduction

The Social Comparison Theory (SCT) has been a long utilized lens for aiding researchers to deeply understand how young people formulate their body image. SCT assumes that people frequently evaluate their opinions and abilities, and in the absence of an objective basis for comparison, this need to evaluate is naturally satisfied with a comparison with others like the comparing individual. Depending on the mindset of the individual, the processes and aftermath of various comparisons have a wide array of effects.

Still, in order to deeply understand how young people formulate their body image, one must grasp its psychological aspects. The SCT has historically been utilized to do just that, and although over 60 years have passed since social psychologist Leon Festinger first poised his theory of Social Comparison the discussion, critique, and utilization of this theory in literature has not diminished.

The SCT has helped shed light on many topics including that act of jealousy, pluralistic ignorance, coping mechanisms, conformity, interpersonal communications, and of course self-esteem and satisfaction (Sullis & Wills, 1991). This diverse infrastructure has poised the SCT as a landmark in social psychology and body image research (Thompson et al. 1999).

The social comparison theory has been utilized to study body image, however Krayer, Indledew and Iphofen (2008) recommended extending knowledge in the area of how comparisons are used by different individuals in order provide insight into how interventions could be sensitive to individual variations. In a broader scope, Cash & Smolak (2011) note that a century of body image theory research has been focused on dysfunctional and dissatisfied body image. However, it is necessary to contribute to the conceptual literature in terms of positive, and healthy body image. This is especially pertinent in the following study as the youth were found to be body image satisfied, rather than dissatisfied. Therefore understanding these processes can inform not only researchers but practitioners as well.

The most critical component of the following study is to not only shed light on adolescence females comparison processes but also offer critical elaboration and modification to the theory of social comparison. This is due to the recommendation made by Thompson et al. (1999), who notes that “this theoretical model is still in its relative infancy and therefore calls for future research in order to “evaluate individual differences in social comparison, to develop multidimensional instruments of social comparison, to investigate populations at risk, and to assess and further define treatment strategies” (p. 140).

Review of Literature

In order to provide more context to this problem, it is important to understand the cognitive factors that perpetuate body image issues in young females. This area of research has received great attention as young females continue to strive to subscribe to social norms and stereotypes (Cash, Morrow, Hrabosky & Perry, 2004). These negative attitudes can lead to negative self-esteem, unstable mental health, decreased enjoyment in day-to-day activities, unhealthy eating habits, and eating disorders across many cultures and ethnic groups (Liechty, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2006; Cash, Morrow, Hrabosky, & Perry, 2004; Smolak, 2004).

Body image can be a complex concept to understand as there are many dimensions and processes related to attitudes regarding one's body (Cash, 2004). Nevertheless, body image is most commonly defined as "a multidimensional self-attitude towards one's body, particularly its appearance" (Cash & Henry, 1995, pp. 19; Cash, Morrow, Hrabosky, & Perry, 2004, pp. 1081). This often refers to how people think, feel and behave in regard to their own appearance (Muth & Cash, 1997). This aspect of body image is often called evaluative body image, which is commonly measured in children and adolescents (Smolak, 2004).

Evaluative body image refers to the level of satisfaction one has with their own body and negative body image evaluation can derive from self-perceived physical attributes or external factors in one's environment (Muth & Cash, 1997). This process requires children to have an understanding and awareness of their own

bodies, which has been known to happen as early as 5 years old (Smolak, 2004). Girls in particular are known to internalize these negative attitudes and evaluate their bodies negatively because of the cultural expectations and unrealistic extreme standards outlined by society.

These societal standards contribute the notion of appearance schemas—a concept that is widely discussed in body image evaluation research (Sinton & Birch, 2006). The term “appearance schemas” arises from the understanding of the cognitive component of the human body and how it is generalized in our society by ingraining the importance of appearance in young people’s thought processes. Therefore, the presence of appearance schemas can contribute to body dissatisfaction by increasing the focus and importance of physical appearances (Sinton & Birch, 2006).

Social Comparison Theory

The SCT has been said to have a “most peculiar history” (Sulls & Wills, 1991, p. 3), and is highly abstract in terms of its use and development over time. As Festinger was developing the theory at hand, his cognitive dissonance, successive, and informal social communication theories were also moving to the forefront of scholarship. Unlike the latter three theories, Social Comparison Theory was focused on individual orientation rather than group dynamics which made this theory desirable to those wishing to avoid studying the power among groups (Sulls & Wills, 1991).

Key Elements & Assumptions

Framing the theory around the premise of an individual's processes, social comparisons are said to occur because humans are naturally driven to self-evaluate and collect information about the world around them (i.e. they are driven and motivated to know). This is often conducted internally via self-evaluation that is recognized as a "normative phenomenon yielding information important to survival in and adaptation to one's environment" (Warren, 2006, p. 2). Humans conduct this self-evaluation by comparing themselves to others based on various dimensions. Examples of these dimensions are ability, appearance, and attitude.

The Social Comparison Theory was formulated among nine hypotheses, eight corollaries, and eight derivations. These derivations are based on the assumption *that humans want to have a firm understanding of what they can and cannot do*. These components are summarized here (Sulls & Wills, 1991, p. 5):

1. The social processes arise when the evaluation of opinions or abilities is not feasible by testing directly in the environment.
2. Under such circumstances, people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to others.
3. These comparison lead to pressures based on uniformity (i.e. people must match one another in the dimension at hand).
4. There is a tendency to stop comparing oneself to those who conflict—especially if one conflicts the comparison dimension in question.

5. Factors such as importance, relevance, and attraction to a group, which affects the strength of the original motivation for comparison, will affect the strength of the pressure toward uniformity.

Processes

The process in which this occurs has also been summarized in three steps:

1. acquisition of social comparison information,
2. thinking about the information in relation to the self and;
3. reacting to the information (Wood, 1996).

However, these processes do not occur at once as Festinger hypothesized “that when a person is uncertain about a specific attribute, he or she will clarify his or her standing by examining the attribute with regard to objective sources of information or against direct physical standards” (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 126). If these standards are not easily accessible, individuals then turn to others to discover this information.

Current research categorizes the comparison process in two ways: *upward* and *downward*. *Downward comparison* is when an individual compares oneself to someone “worse off” in a particular dimension of interest. This type of comparison is believed to enhance subjective well-being and self-perception, whereas *upward comparison* (when an individual compares oneself to someone who is “better off” on the dimension of interest) is believed to decrease well-being (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004).

Festinger, also noted that there is a drive for self-evaluation and the

necessity for this evaluation to be based upon a comparison to others. Opinions and ability can be interchangeable in this theory thus, complicating the human processes that take place when comparing oneself to another subject.

In order for these comparison processes to function effectively, humans need to know their own capacities and limitations and they must be accurate in their opinions of objects and of other people (1989). However, over time it has been found that these comparisons can occur intentionally and unintentionally.

In order to illustrate these processes in a digestible format, the following diagram has been adopted based on the foundational works regarding social comparison theory (Figure 29):



Figure 29. Social Comparison Processes

Social Comparison and Body Image

More specifically, the majority of body image research is driven by these assumptions (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). Perceptions of relative standing can influence many outcomes, including a person's self-concept, level of aspiration, and feelings of well-being. While all of these outcomes are internal and subjective, the comparison process is a core element of human conduct and the human experience (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). The SCT also suggests that when people compare themselves to an individual whom they want to look like, thus enacting an upward comparison, their overall self-regard and well-being decrease (Lin & Kulik, 2002) and body dissatisfaction increases (Tiggemann & Slater, 2004). This dissatisfaction has been attributed to the internalization of body image—a central component in the development of body dissatisfaction (Sands & Wardle, 2003; Cash, 2004).

Furthermore, the relationship to the comparison target is vital to understanding these processes. It is acknowledged that *unsought* comparisons often occur. Meaning, the referent point used in the comparison process may be someone *dissimilar* to the individual. This comparison frequently occurs internally when comparing physical appearance and eating habits (Morrison Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). Individuals also have a tendency to choose inappropriate comparison targets that lead certain individuals to be more vulnerable than others to sociocultural appearance pressures. If the comparison or internal feedback is in terms of one's body (ex: teasing about weight or even ambiguous information that an aspect of

one's appearance is unattractive) one's body image may be affected (Thompson et al. 1999).

Additionally, mass marketed, distant targets such as the media are also perceived as eliciting greater pressure to conform to idealistic standards of attractiveness than targets that are tangible in daily life such as friends and family (Morrison Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). In one study, individuals with eating disorders significantly overestimate their size when exposed to photographs of women in popular fashion magazines while body size perception remained accurate when not exposed to these photos (Shaw & Waller, 1995). Heinberg and Thompson (1992) also found that females who considered universal/mass marketed targets (celebrities, actresses, models) as an important comparison group were more likely to engage in unhealthy weight control practices such as vomiting and disordered eating than those who did not see these universal targets as important. Bair, Steele and Mills (2014) confirmed that woman's personal body ideals are shaped by the perceived norms of their peers, as women in the study selected a thinner personal body ideal in conditions where they believed their peers had done the same. This effect was also seen when the norm appeared to be a heavier body construction.

Related to youth, the social comparison process often occurs during adolescence—a challenging phase of maturation. These comparisons and internalizations are often utilized as a natural means for gathering information about the social world. Since this age group finds the development of personal and social identities a necessity, this process occurs often (Kraye, Ingledew, &

Iphofen, 2008). This comparison is frequently made between adolescent females and models portrayed in popular media and advertising (Grab & Hyde, 2006). These comparisons again, put adolescent females at risk for low body satisfaction, eating disorders, and becomes a highly relevant risk factor due to the extent these comparisons take place (Strahan et al., 2008).

However, research originating in the field of health communication may indicate that all youth do not utilize social comparisons to the same extent. Information behavior literature can begin to shed light on these processes.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to understand how various sociocultural factors impact the extent to which adolescent females utilize social comparison processes to construct personal body image. Factors that shape adolescent females attitudes and their beliefs related to their own body image were examined in this study. Particular attention was focused on the assumptions associated with social comparison processes and their influence in the construction of personal body image.

Methodology

Here the researcher utilized qualitative strategies, which were needed to formulate a deeper understanding of this multidimensional concept. To date various methods have been developed and introduced to measure the concept of body image. However, when determining an appropriate approach to answering the research question the following methods were deemed appropriate. This is largely impart due to the fact that is it of continued importance to understand the manner in which comparison processes occur. Although many quantitative studies have yielded important information regarding the SCT, it is important to understand these processes on a micro-level (Cash, 2004, Kraye, Indledew & Iphofen, 2008).

More specifically, Photovoice techniques, which are inspired by youth voice and community based participatory research, were utilized in order to provide deep insight to the day-to-day lives of participants. The enchantment of community well-being is a primary goal of Photovoice as it offers an ideal method for young people to bring voice to issues affecting their lives. The photos and discourse that is generated through these methods are utilized to raise community awareness regarding public policy change, human rights by allowing participants to offer commentary to those in positions of power. These methods have been utilized across the globe and have been known to break down stigma and stereotypes held by various populations (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004). This approach was appropriate when seeking to understand how adolescent females construct their body image since Photovoice is known for its ability to “facilitate youth-adult

partnerships in which each group may gain insights into each other's worlds from which they are ordinarily insulated.” (Wang, 2006, pg. 157). This methodology is utilized as a tool that can be easily adapted to a variety of scenarios and has the ability to serve as a mechanism for personal and community change for marginalized and underserved communities (Royce, Parra-Medina, & Messias, 2006; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004).

The utilization of Photovoice with youth populations has distinct benefits as research has shown this practice inspires youth-adult partnerships and allows both youth and adults to gain insights into each other's worlds (Wang, 2008). Youth participants in particular have noted greater capacities and confidence after Photovoice research has been conducted in their communities, which proves the act of participation alone is liberating as youth regardless of the outcome, have a psychologically empowering experience (Vaughn, 2013). Youth involved in Photovoice have also displayed the ability to exercise autonomy and express their creativity to a new audience. This effect allows youth to “advocate their concerns using their language and experiences” which shows that Photovoice projects are concurrently meaningful for communities, adults, and youth (Wang, 2008).

Three phases of data collection were utilized: introduction and semi-structured interviews, sharing circles and project reflect, and community outreach.

The first session was utilized in order to obtain demographic from participants. During the initial photograph training session, an extension of the traditional Photovoice method was introduced as youth were instructed to only

photograph themselves—i.e. selfies. This was crucial in order to conceptualize their body image and is appropriate for this study as selfies are seen as self-reflexive and self-representation narrative strategy (Schleser, 2014). Today, when one takes a selfie, he or she portrays a form of reflection that can now be controlled by the photographer proving that although the phenomenon of taking self-portraits is not new, the motivations and reasons behind the practice has changed (Warfield, 2014). Additionally, many believe that this exercise is highly motivated by participation on social media sites. This is substantial as the way one presents themselves on social media outlets is yet another mode of expression (Fausing, 2013) and proves that selfies are seen as a way to gain control over how an individual's presents oneself through a self-portrait. The elicitation of selfies was imperative to the concept of understanding how youth not only present themselves at face value but also aimed to remove the barrier between the researcher and the subject—especially in relation to the topic of body image formation. This method attempts to do this by stepping through the image and into the image making process in order to allow youth to partake in the discourse that surrounds the world on the backside of the image (Fausing, 2013).

Additionally this first session was utilized to conduct initial semi-structured interviews with each participant and conduct the photo training session. Sharing circles were conducted after a ten take photo taking period was allotted. This was appropriate in the second phase because youth were able to express their thoughts on body image with a group of like-minded peers. Finally, a third session is

forthcoming in order to allow youth to display their photos to community members and stakeholders.

Sample Selection and Characteristics

Participants were recruited with the assistance of adult leaders at each location as well as through personal acquaintances. 15 total participants were recruited. All participants were between the ages of 11-14 with a mean age of 13

The ethnic breakdown was 46.6% White (N=7), 26.6% Latin/Hispanic (N=4), and 33.3% African American/Black (N=5). It is also notable to highlight that the sample included two sets of identical twins from both the Wixon Valley 4 H Club and the Lincoln Recreation Center. Additionally, one set of twins also had a younger sister in the sample. This information is summarized in Table 15.

Table 15

Sample Demographics by Individual

#	Youth	Age	Race	Site Location
1	Holly ¹	13	White	Wixon Valley 4-H Club
2	Kate	14	White	
3	Anna ¹	13	White	
4	Julie	13	White	
5	Avery	13	White	
6	Annabelle	14	Latin/Hispanic	Bryan Independent School District
7	Yvie	13	White	
8	Paula	13	Latin/Hispanic	
9	Callie	13	White	
10	Isabelle	14	African American & Latin Hispanic	
11	Grace	14	Latin/Hispanic	Lincoln Recreation Center
12	Aaliyah	11	African American	
13	Kelsey ^{2 3}	13	African American	
14	Kim ^{2 3}	13	African American	
15	Layla ³	11	African American	

Note¹: Participants are sisters and identical twins.

Note²: Participants are sisters and identical twins.

Note³: Participants are sisters.

Data Analysis

Interviews and sharing circles were analyzed thematically utilizing the constant comparative method while guided by the interpretations of the participants—a hallmark of qualitative research. This approach allows the researcher to gain the trust of the participants and generate theoretical ideas that support and inform the research question (Glaser, 1965). In a study such as this, it is important to constantly reevaluate the data utilizing this method in order to ensure that rich data is produced (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). Through this process, data

from interview transcripts were coded into themes. This processes was carried out by reading each of the transcripts and assigning a thematic code to paragraphs, phrases, and sections. New data and codes were compared with not only data from individuals but with those from all three sites and across all coding categories. Over 40 categories originally emerged and were ultimately combined after various verification strategies were employed.

Additionally, the photographs were analyzed using Collier's (1986) indirect and direct analysis. This type of analysis is valuable when evaluating visual data as the information communicated without languages is often, if not more, powerful than verbiage from the aforementioned interview transcripts. The indirect analysis takes place when the youth participants utilize the photos to aid them in the storytelling process while direct analysis allows the researcher to employ an open viewing of the photographs. In this case, youth selected certain photographs to enrich their storytelling process when answering questions about body image formation during the sharing circles. Additionally, the researcher organized and compared the images to detected themes and codes.

Various verification strategies were utilized to ensure trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is comprised of four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. These strategies are summarized in Appendix I.

Findings

As a whole participants reported feeling satisfied with their bodies. This satisfaction was thoroughly discussed throughout the semi-structured interview and sharing circle process. The thematic analysis revealed that youth compare themselves to two main groups: friends and peers and media images. Youth progressed and negotiated the abovementioned comparisons in various ways when formulating their body image. These processes are explored below.

Body Image Satisfaction

Survey results indicated that all participants were satisfied with their bodies. Based on survey data, 53.3% (N=8) of participants reported their body satisfaction as somewhat satisfied while 46.6% (N=7) of participants reported their current body satisfaction as very satisfied.

This perceived satisfaction was further explained during interviews. When asked about the feelings they have about their bodies, Callie, who said she was somewhat satisfied with her body also revealed the struggles she's had in finding this satisfaction, "I was in a state of depression for like 5 months because I didn't want to eat anything and I'm just now learning in 2015 that I can't worry about what other people say."

Some youth discussed the challenges they faced in formulating their positive body image, however, every participant celebrated their positive body images and was continually eager to share the various intricacies in their lives that contributed to this positivity. Youth continually equated body image to various

facets in their daily lives and are necessary to consider when exploring various comparison are made when constructing body image. The dimensions utilized to construct body image dealt with many aspects of their lives including extra-curricular activities, athletic ability, fashion-sense and style, beauty, and overall appearance.

Comparison Between Peers

As youth progressed discussed their body image, it was clear that they often engaged in self-evaluations, self-improvement, and self-enhancement information acquisitions. Youth were also often presented with unsought comparisons from their peers.

It is known that self-evaluations take place when one wants to simply gain information about themselves in regards to others. In general comparisons were cited as ways to get messages about body image, “seeing other people and how they are and looking at myself and comparing.”

Participants claimed that they chose to not to draw comparisons in order to not subject themselves to negative messages about their bodies. Many participants noted the importance of not participating in comparisons in order to maintain their positive body image. Paula said, “I don’t have no feelings about my body. I don’t worry about what I look like because everyone should respect how they look, they don’t have to worry about other people.”

Holly acknowledged that other girls at school had desirable qualities related to appearance, “I always think like why I can’t I be that skinny or be that person

that starts a trend.” Julie echoed these thoughts although claiming to not participate in a comparison, “I don’t compare but it’s like ‘oh I like her outfit I wish I could dress like that.’” Weight was also utilized as a comparison dimension and was mentioned by Isabelle, “if I see someone fitter than me I want to be like that.”

Additionally, participants often spoke of “older” and “popular girls” as comparison targets. Kate said, “I don’t compare myself to them because they are way older but I do get ideas on what to wear,” while Julie echoed, “there are a lot of girls you see and there are qualities they have that you want.”

Participants voiced the importance of self-acceptance and empowerment, regardless of the fact that they did claim to feel unsatisfied with their bodies at certain times. This was noted when discussing being around others at school and in situations that forced participants to be more aware of their bodies. Holly noted that being conscious of other’s bodies at school caused a heightened sense of awareness and dissatisfaction, “sometimes I feel embarrassed because I’m not the same as them [popular girls]...it’s the only thing I think about in the locker room.” Anna even recognized that these comparisons caused her to think about her body image more than usual, “I feel good about my body when I don’t think about it or compare myself.”

Nevertheless, the effects of unsought comparisons were experienced often when youth interacted with their peers. Layla discussed times she received unsolicited comments from peers at school, “sometimes other people will say ‘I

don't know why she's wearing that, she look ugly' You can't let that phase you. You gotta be like, that's just my style.”

Callie also mentioned that bullying from peers that enacted certain comparisons, “I don't really like my body and I feel like I don't get liked because I'm different than everyone else.”

These examples show that youth are often forced to compare themselves based on unsought comparisons put forth by their peers many times this occurs when participants felt threatened by their peers.

In the following examples youth participated in upward and downward comparisons. In most instances youth participated in both upward and downward comparisons when comparing on appearance related dimensions and downward comparisons when comparing themselves on other attributes such as commitment to school, grades, and personality. When youth enacted these comparisons they mostly did so with a realistic grasp on their social world by utilizing comparisons that were unrelated to appearance.

For example, Avery utilized a downward comparison to emphasize certain skills and abilities, “Some girls at school are crazy skinny and sometimes I wish I could be like that but sometimes I'm glad because I couldn't do sports because I'd be too weak and wimpy.”

This type of rejection was discussed at great length. In general, youth claimed they did not participate in comparisons but discussed how they observed other girls at school comparing and utilizing upward comparisons, “They [other

girls] get down on themselves because of the popular girls are perfect.” Many of the participants referenced that other girls strive to look a certain way in order to achieve appearance and body related ideals and attributed this to acceptance and popularity Yvie said, “I think it has to do with popularity and trying to be popular” but quickly unrelated this dynamic to her friend group, “my group of friends isn’t the people who are popular. And my group of friends doesn’t really care.”

Downward comparisons were also observed in these examples. To these girls, those at school who they perceived to have the “wrong priorities” were not worthy to give feedback regarding body image or otherwise. For example, in one case, youth recognized that girls at school took great stock in their appearance but did not have good grades. To Kelsey, not having good grades was much more of a priority than achieving appearance ideals:

“Some girls think they all that. They be like “I got this, I got this” Then they get a progress report and they don’t got it. Some people think that every day when they wake up they have to be all that and do everything they can to look perfect. But you don’t have to look perfect every day.”

Participants chose to understand their stance on non-appearance related topics as they frequently compared themselves to others at school on dimensions related to homework and behavior. This data indicates that participants did not consider achieving appearance ideals as the most important attribute to idealize. Julie even emphasized the fact that appearance and body related issues should *not* be a priority in their lives, “A lot of girls focus on how they look and don’t focus on their grades as much as how their looks and hair and stuff.”

Many participants also viewed the dismissal of appearance related activities such as wearing a lot of make-up or worrying about their hair, as a statement *against* those who were, in their minds, overly concerned with their body image. For example, Avery claimed that not conforming to the “popular girls,” made a statement about her level of happiness and satisfaction with her body, “sometimes I need to fix my hair and stuff but people like me for who I am and I don’t really care.” Kate agreed as she said, “I can show up in jeans and a raggedy t-shirt and be fine. I really don’t care.”

These ideas were reverberated as youth produced commentary related to school and homework. Julie continually stated the importance of rejecting appearance related goals and focusing on other activities:

“I’m ahead in Spanish and Math. Being smart isn’t weird, when you get older those stupid people are going to be janitors or marry someone rich. When people figure out that I’m smart it makes you feel good. Pretty people aren’t dumb but sometimes they are; I tend to equate pretty with stupid.”

These examples provide salient information regarding upward and downward comparison that took place between the participants and their peers at school.

These instances also provide examples for the third phase of social comparison processes—reacting to the information, as youth chose to utilize cognitive, affective, and sometimes, behavioral reactions to the comparisons made.

In many cases youth chose to refute this information because they did not believe their comparison targets had the same priorities. Participants also felt proud

of these priorities in many cases, thus exemplifying an affective reaction to the comparison targets. Nevertheless, there were times when youth utilized comparisons made between their peers to get ideas on what to wear. This exemplifies a behavioral reaction as many participants imitated their comparison targets on this particular dimension.

Comparisons Made by Peers

Although participants illustrated some comparisons, central discourse revealed that their *peers* participated in these processes much more than they did. Holly spoke of times when their peers enacted downward comparisons to achieve an affective (feeling proud) reaction, “Like skinny people vs. fat people. Some people think if they put themselves next to someone that’s bigger than them they feel better than them.”

To explain further Yvie spoke of an upward comparison, “comparison happens they want to look like someone else, they don’t like their body and they just think other people look better than them.”

When youth descried comparisons conducted by their peers they were largely centered on appearance and weight status. Comments from Annabelle illustrate this effect, “Some girls like to see themselves as skinny to fit in and they don’t like the way they look compared to the other girls.”

When asked if other girls their age had body image issues, these types of comparisons were at the forefront of conversation. Callie explained, “it is because people think they have to be like everyone else for other people to like them.”

Participants were quick to note that they did not participate in comparisons as much as their peers and rejoiced this fact in many ways. Participants claimed not model these behaviors and believed that enacting and putting great stock in comparisons related to appearance meant they were not focused on the right priorities.

Comparison to Friends

Nevertheless, friendship was a topic widely discussed by participants. Friends and peers were quickly distinguished between one another as participants viewed many girls at school in their peripheral and considered their friends as individuals who offered empowering and accepting dialogues related to body image. The common discourse was that youth viewed their friend-groups as the innermost circle for comparison and body image construction. Yvie illustrated, “They don’t make me feel bad about my body, they don’t ever say anything like I’m ugly or anything is wrong with what I’m wearing” and “they are there to compliment you and make you feel better like ‘ I love your earrings, I love your shirt.’”

This type of empowerment was echoed throughout the conversations about friendships. Friends appeared to be very valuable reference targets for the participants. As stated, participants utilized the comparisons to their friends in a vastly different way than that between peers. For example, friends were focused on attributes such as happiness and personality, rather than physical qualities as Grace

pointed out, “my friends don’t say much about my body they just say stuff about my personality.”

Paula spoke of the ways in which their groups were ostracized for being different, “Some other girls in school won’t be friends with us because we don’t have things and we look different.” Callie added, “we don’t hang out with the fakes.”

This conversation highlights several social comparison processes. The participants here although do not explicitly state that they are comparing themselves to their friends, enact comparisons within their group to form greater understandings of norms within their social circle. By offering uplifting comments like those featured above, friends also employed unsought comparisons. However, in these cases they were positive and uplifting. It is plausible to assume that these comments derived from comparisons made by both parties. Participants focusing on personality and other qualities also displays a shift in focus of comparisons from appearance related qualities to internal attributes—also known as self-enhancement. This shift may indicate that participants are comparing themselves in different dimensions and utilizing these reinforcing statements to remain resilient to the negative unsought comments offered by their peers. Therefore, participants are not only displaying behavioral reactions to the comments made by their friends, but also refuting the comments and expectations of their peers (cognitive reaction) based on the feedback from these friend groups.

Overall participants made comparisons between their peers as well as their friend groups in vastly different ways. Participants utilized the rejection of sought and unsought comparisons between their peers to refute the comparisons made between them and the perceived popular girls. Since the participants considered their friend groups as a place where they could be themselves, they likely considered the popular girls to be irrelevant comparison targets, further explaining why they rejected these comparisons. The participants also utilized the narratives from their friends that “gave them permission” to reject and not conform to the standards set by the older and more popular girls at school.

Comparisons and The Media

Participants also indicated that the media played a role in their daily lives and in regards to their body image formation. Although youth mostly felt satisfied with their bodies they did assert that the media influenced them in various ways. Social media outlets, music, and television were themes most cited in regards to these influences.

Youth talked extensively about the comparisons made to those in the media. These comparisons were much like those between peers in that participants recognized the overall difference between their lives and that of celebrities. The comparisons made here also reflected the same effects as those seen between youth and their friends as participants idolized other non-appearance related characteristics in various celebrities.

Both upward and downward comparisons were employed when utilizing

media figures as comparison targets. Although youth had an understanding of the fact that they were unlike most media figures, they did speak briefly about appearance related comparisons that take place. In many instances these comparisons were discussed in a third person context and not directly attributed to participants' personal behaviors. These were once again related to discussions about why girls their age have body image issues, "I think every girl wants to be the perfect shape because of the actresses out there and girls are influenced by that; they are so perfect and it makes girls want to be them," said Annabelle.

Nevertheless, participants did not completely disregard self-evaluative comparisons as Yvie noted, "You know you see other girls on there. You see the pretty girls wan you want to be like them. They influence you in a way that you might not know. Cause like, everyone that you watch you're trying to make them into your life."

This effect was seen again when explained her motivation for making self-evaluation comparisons. As Paula noted, "you try to see how you're similar. You see how their character's life is. You see how they act and how you act. Like I see shirts I have and jeans and I have them at home."

In this case, the participant was trying to simply obtain information in order to see how she related to television characters based on appearance related dimensions. This is distinct because there was no mention of needing to obtain this information due to a problem or threat.

This type of information collection was exemplified when conversations related to the weight of characters on certain reality shows. Holly postulated why this may be the case, “A lot of those people on these shows eat a lot and don’t get fat because they have a high metabolism or whatever that’s called.”

Callie, who often struggled with her body image, equated size with health in this case and utilized an upward comparison when viewing the sizes of television stars. However, these comparisons ultimately resulted in rejection, due to the fact that she recognized she was unlike the stars on television, “all the TV series I watch those people are healthier than me and I want to be more like them but I know I shouldn’t feel that way.”

However, as the conversations continued, youth began to participate in the principal discussion, which outlined how other factors were considered when enacting comparisons. Yvie noted:

“I like Jennifer Lawrence She’s pretty and a good actor but I’ve never hear anything and about her—same with Taylor Swift. Other stars like Miley changed too much. She’s ugly and get too much attention an she’s inappropriate.”

Therefore to participants comparisons were only relevant if they perceived them to be honorable in real-life settings. Paula spoke about this, “I want to look like those people on TV. I want to be perfect like Ariana Grande or Jennifer Lawrence. They don’t do nothing bad, they don’t put people down.”

Nevertheless, youth participated in more rejections of comparisons than acceptance. This was most likely due to the abovementioned factors of utilizing

real-life contexts to relate to individuals in the limelight. To highlight this process, Yvie explained why these comparisons took place, “It’s just like, you want to see how everyone looks, and everyone is beautiful the way they are.”

Downward comparisons also occurred as participants utilized non-appearance related dimensions for comparisons. Conversations about people being fake and not acting appropriately were constant. As Avery said, “there are times I don’t wish to be those people because those people are fake.”

When these comparisons took place, participants often responded with an affective reaction as they felt proud of their own stance on bullying and treating people appropriately. Paula explained further, “sometimes there’s these girls in movies that are based on girls bullying people, there’s a skinny girl in a movie and they bully someone because she’s bigger and different and that’s not right to do.”

This same concept was employed as another participant utilized both upward and downward comparisons when comparing herself on other behavioral related dimensions. As Layla noted, it was important to compare herself to the behaviors of youth in a television show in order to shed light on her behaviors at home. When watching the show highlighted youth participating in behaviors that she did not deem appropriate, and thereby realized that she needed to evaluate her behaviors in order to maintain her current path to success. This is an example of self-improvement due to the fact that she utilized the comparison information to make herself better on a certain dimension.

“I watch this show on Netflix, called Beyond Scared Straight. When I watch it makes me think, ‘what do I need to change and what do I need to

keep the same'. One girl was always sneaking out and it made me think 'maybe I shouldn't spend so much time with my friends but study more.'" Overall the comparisons to celebrities and stars on television were utilized.

Participants ultimately understood that many celebrities were unlike them and undesirable in real life. This was largely due to the fact that youth viewed the real-life behaviors of certain celebrities as undesirable. Youth utilized comparisons largely based on behavioral dimensions rather than appearance related ideals. This is likely due to the fact that youth understood that the appearance of celebrities was unattainable and unrealistic to their lives. These realizations caused youth to participate in a cognitive reaction to these comparison targets, thus refuting most comparisons made to media figures.

Discussion

As with previous research on the SCT, the findings of this study indicate that social comparison processes contribute to our overall understandings of body image formation. The complexities of these processes are simplified throughout the findings in order to provide narrative to these processes in a real-life context. This was an important methodological approach as very few studies have given voice to these issues (Kraye, Ingledew, & Iphofen, 2008).

These results serve as examples to the ways in which these processes can work in real-life contexts. The model developed postulates that acquisition of social information is clear-cut. Here, these processes are not clear and distinct as it appears that youth may quickly move from one type of process to another when utilizing various comparisons. For example, youth may begin to simply self-evaluate on a

certain dimension and then feel inferior to their comparison target and begin to feel threatened. This then enacts a self-enhancement process on another dimension. In a similar vein, youth may begin to compare themselves to a media figure in order to self-improve, and quickly realize their comparison is unrealistic, thus moving back to the self-evaluation phase. The movement between these processes begs for further attention in research in order to understand the subtle processes that occur between these phases (Wood, 1996). This is especially important as literature examining the SCT is frequently utilized but rarely examined. Nevertheless, the researcher has attempted to divide these three processes below in order to begin to shed light on the narratives associated with the acquisition of social comparison information.

Much of the literature related to the SCT suggests that individuals have a tendency to choose inappropriate comparison targets—like distant figures in the media. When this occurs certain individuals can become vulnerable to various risk factors associated with poor body image or body image dissatisfaction (Thompson et al. 1999; Kraye, Ingledeu, & Iphofen, 2008). However, this study sheds light on the process that occur with *body-satisfied* individuals in a sociocultural context. Here these processes are outlined in relation to this study and the abovementioned model to highlight the various ways body satisfied individuals acquire, process, and react to comparison targets.

Acquisition of Social Comparison Information

It is known that social comparisons are enacted when individuals seek to evaluate themselves on a certain attribute. The need to evaluate is the first step to acquiring social comparison information and occurs when the evaluation of opinions or abilities is not feasible by testing directly in the environment (Sullis & Wills, 1991). This acquisition of information can occur when individuals seek to obtain information, solve a problem, or feel threatened (Wood, 1996).

Self-Evaluation

Participants noted various times when they conducted self-evaluation based on those seen in the media. This is promising, as it is known that females who consider mass media targets as an important comparison group are more likely to engage in unhealthy weight control practices such as vomiting and disordered eating than those who did not see these universal targets as important (Heinberg & Thompson, 1992). Therefore, the fact that youth stated that simply wanted to see how celebrities looked but did not aim to conform or feel badly about their own appearance after these comparisons indicates that youth may be aware of the unrealistic and unattainable ideals portrayed in the media.

This was an imperative process when analyzing the SCT as youth were claiming to be simply acquiring information but often did not display this in their behaviors. Although youth said they wanted to simply see what the celebrities looked like, it was clear through the analysis of their photographs, that media narratives were an influencing factor they were unaware of. To expand, youth

displayed photos of highly-feminized images and posed in ways similar to photographs taken and posted by celebrities on mass media markets. Therefore, although the girls said they were simply collecting information, they were inadvertently influenced by this information in ways they were unable to articulate. This could be due to the fact that the youth do not have the cognitive skills to articulate how they go about collecting information about their social world and how this may inadvertently influence their thoughts and behaviors.

Regardless of these influences, participants did note that real-life behaviors of celebrities largely determined their thoughts on celebrities and those in the limelight. This may be attributed to the fact that these youth identified as body satisfied. Wood-Barcalow et al., (2010) found that those with positive body image often report lower internalization of media influences. So although they were unaware of some of these internalizations, their narratives surrounding celebrities is a promising characteristic in the development of positive body image. This also coincides with Holmqvist & Frisen (2012) who found that those who had positive body image found that individual's personality actually determines whether they perceive that person as good-looking.

Additionally, the conversations that revolved around youth comparing themselves to their friends indicates that they may utilized these close-knit connections to solidify their positive body image, rather than seeking this type of information from figures in the media. This process coincides with the concept of reciprocity because youth chose to surround themselves with peers who were

accepting of their body. This is a clear characteristic of individuals with positive body image as youth chose to utilize relationships that shaped their environment in positive and enhancing ways (Wood-Barcalow, et al., 2010)

Self-Improvement

However, in many instances between friends and peers, youth were in need of information and needed to “solve the problem” of not knowing how to dress, hereby enacting a self-improvement comparison to acquire information on appearance related topics. Youth felt that the older and more popular girls had valuable information about their appearance and sought to obtain this information by comparing themselves on these dimensions. The fact that these processes occurred between more tangible targets also indicates that youth had realistic goals when considering how to self-improve in various dimensions and is once again in keeping with Krayer, Ingledeu, & Iphofen’s findings (2008) who noted that friends and peers were more salient comparison targets for central attributes than media celebrities or mass marketed images.

Nevertheless, not all comparisons discussed were positive as youth spoke of times when they struggled with body image satisfaction and sought information about others’ bodies from the media. This is in accordance with Perloff (2014), who notes that youth often engage in a self-perpetuating cycle of influence, meaning those struggling with body image issues may often turn to outside sources to collect information about their bodies. These comparisons can be sought via social media, television, and musical outlets and often perpetuate negative feelings

about one's body. However, this effect was not discussed at great length which may indicate that youth may be keenly aware of the fact that mass marketed comparison targets are not realistic. Regardless, this processes is notable for further inquiry in order to understand how youth with positive body image characteristics navigate these struggles.

All in all, self-improvement processes occurred in many different ways. These comparisons were expected as youth are inclined to compare on various dimensions in order to negotiate societal expectations and standards (Kramer, Ingledew & Iphofen, 2008). These types of comparison in this study did not seem to override other positive influences in the lives of youth. For example, youth comparing to their friends allowed them to prioritize which comparisons effected them which was also confirmed by Wood-Barcalow (2010). Therefore, although self-improvement comparisons took place, these results indicate these factors did not adversely affect the youth's positive body image.

To continue, the effects of body positive image constructions may also be a result of self-enhancement processes.

Self-Enhancement

Participants in this group rarely spoke of feeling threatened by comparisons in the media. However, girls at school did make the youth feel that they needed to further analyze themselves in relation to other groups on other dimensions unrelated to appearance. These processes most often occurred when youth were, once again, presented with comparison information. As noted, the unsought

comparisons often resulted in youth simply evaluating themselves. However, youth at times did feel threatened by information and felt they needed to enact self-enhancement comparison in order to neutralize the threats of others.

These self-enhancement processes were seen most often in a self-serving manner. It is known that individuals are often biased and hold unrealistically positive views of themselves. This often causes individuals to compare themselves on an alternate dimension in order to mitigate any threat to self-esteem (Wood, 1989). This effect was witnessed in this study as participants perceived their involvement in school activities as superior to their peers' participation in appearance related enhancement activities. It is likely that youth felt threatened by the appearance of the popular girls and therefore, chose to compare themselves in an alternate dimension in order to highlight their abilities and negate any threats to their self-esteem. This is known to some as cognitive dissonance, another theory created by Leon Festinger. This effect is seen when youth choose to highlight an alternate comparative dimension in order to rationalize the conflict in order to protect themselves (Festinger, 1962). This effect is an important process to note when constructing body image because although in many situations it appears that the youth have a firm grasp of healthy body image, they also prove they are not cognitively stable enough to simply accept these threats and process them in a healthy way in relation to their own body image.

However, the overall message sent was one similarly described by Krayer Ingledew and Iphofen (2008) who found that individuals use constructive processes

like self-improvement comparisons, in order to counter threatening comparisons. These phases, of course, occur quickly and are therefore difficult to pin point in these instances. Regardless, the youth in this study did exemplify these types of comparisons when relaying information about the comparison processes that occur between their peers at school.

One could also argue that the dimensions youth are utilizing in the self-enhancement phase are appropriate for their age group. It is not unconstructive that youth choose to focus on other qualities unrelated to appearance, as many would contend youth should not be overly concerned with appearance and should focus on other priorities like those mentioned in these self-enhancement comparisons. Once again this proved to be an attributed of individuals with body satisfaction.

These types of comparisons therefore served as a protective factor against body image dissatisfaction as youth utilized these comparisons to prioritize their expectations in relation to their lives at school. Additionally, the fact that media figures did not enter the self-enhancement category indicates that youth have an overreaching realistic understanding of their social world. These findings are consistent with Krayer, Ingledew & Iphofen, and (2008) who noted that youth found their friends and peers to be more salient comparison targets and therefore chose to focus on the central attributes of these groups rather than those in the media.

This is an overall area for future inquiry when developing intervention to develop positive body image because these youth exemplify the idea that youth

need to be taught how to process possibly threatening images so they can embrace their bodies and not utilize cognitive dissonance in future encounters. However, it was clear that based on all of the information acquisition phases that youth enacted several types of comparisons upward and downward.

Thinking about Information in Regards to Oneself

Upward Comparisons

It is known that the relationship to the comparison target is vital to understanding these processes and is acknowledged that unsought comparisons often occur. (Morrison Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). This is viewed in the current study the targets for comparison were chosen by youth because they were similar to themselves and deemed worthy of comparison.

These decisions were most likely made by youth because of other influencing factors such as family and friends.

These findings are also positive as youth one again utilized realistic understandings of their social world to negotiate the upward comparisons made between youth and celebrities. Participants realized that even those who were portrayed as “ugly” in the media were in fact still in coherence to appearance ideals. This finding is also confirmed by Holmqvist and Frisen (2012) who found that youth with positive body image were quick to recognize the portrayal of appearance ideals in the media. This is pertinent to this study since youth initially enacted an upward comparison but quickly found the information irrelevant to their lives and rejected the comparison.

Downward Comparisons

Downward comparisons also took place when youth discussed many facets of body image. Downward comparisons occur when an individual compares oneself to someone “worse off” in a particular dimension of interest and are believed to enhance subjective wellbeing and self-perception (Morrison Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). These downward comparisons were mostly centered on school related activities such as grades. For example, youth equated the girls who they considered overly concerned with appearance as silly and compared downwardly toward them because they did not have good grades. Youth also discussed how girls who were skinny were unable to perform certain athletic activities hereby enacting a downward comparison.

These are both examples of ways in which youth regarded themselves as “better off” on a certain dimension. Overall, it has been found that these types of comparisons most often result in positive outcomes. In relation to body image, downward comparisons are often unrecognized by an individual since it is a naturally occurring phenomenon (Wills, 1981). However when studied, Ridolfi et al, (2011) found that a downward comparison to a media image was associated with more positive effects than a downward comparison to a peer. Therefore, the effects of downward comparisons on body image satisfaction need to be further explored as youth in this study conducted downward comparisons between both peers and media figures.

Moreover, the fact that youth also believed their peers utilized more comparisons than they did may indicate that their appearance schemas are much lower than their peers (Sinton & Birch, 2006).

Reacting to the Information

Reactions to social comparison information are considered the final processes in the SCT. These reactions can be cognitive, affective, or behavioral. All three of these processes were exhibited throughout this study.

Cognitive Reactions

Participants in this study displayed cognitive reactions as they often refuted information gained from their comparisons. Many instances where youth utilized appearance related comparisons resulted in a rejection due to the fact that youth did not think these types of attributes were priority in their lives. Youth also distorted the comparisons sometimes due to the fact that they looked down on girls that felt appearance was of utmost importance.

Affective Reactions

However, youth also felt proud in many of these instances when comparing themselves to peers. Youth mentioned feeling jealous at times, of the popular girls but also grounded these responses with overall conversations about how these types of feelings shouldn't be present or matter. Nevertheless, the verbiage used to reference the more affluent girls at school may also indicate that participants did feel jealous in some capacity.

Behavioral Reactions

Youth also referred to a behavioral reaction to these comparisons as they chose to dress in a certain way after enacting these types of comparisons. Behavioral reactions also occurred when youth chose to emulate behaviors they saw in the media. For example, youth chose to improve their behavior after enacting a downward comparison between girls misbehaving on a television show. Youth also chose to glorify certain celebrities because they were considered to have admirable traits in real life.

Additionally, these processes are in keeping with Wood-Barcalow (2010) who found that individuals with positive body image will often create a filter to block out images and messages that could endanger their positive body image. However, it is important to continue to discover if these filters are formulated in a healthy manner or simply being utilized to negate threats to the girl's body image.

Limitations

The purposeful nature of the sample must be considered a limitation in this study. The data collection process was in keeping with research standards but the very nature of studying a core group of individuals regarding their personal feelings about their body image could have skewed results. This study also did not assess if youth exposure to any type of media literacy programs. This could have also potentially skewed results.

In relation to practice these findings are also significant. Future work should focus on how these specific circumstances can aid interventions and programming.

As an example, programmers should develop curriculum that incorporates sociocultural factors into prevention methods. These findings also indicate that family centered education may be the most effective type of programming since youth utilize their familial influences to mediate negative discourses related to body image.

Conclusions

It is known that a century of body image theory research has been focused on dysfunctional and dissatisfied body image. However, it is necessary to contribute to the conceptual literature in terms of positive, and healthy body image. This study aimed to achieve just that by utilizing the SCT as a way of analyzing body image formations.

As a whole, Wood (1989) recognized that various theoretical strands have emerged throughout the development of the SCT. These developments call for a constant reexamination of this theory (Wood, 1989; Wood, 1996). Despite these calls to action, very few researchers have critically examined the SCT (Kramer, Ingledew, & Iphofen, 2008). To begin this type of development, the current study sought to understand how various sociocultural factors impact social comparison processes. This is especially pertinent as the youth in this study were body image satisfied and displayed many characteristics of individuals with positive body image.

When analyzing the body of literature surrounding the SCT,

it is clear that there are still uncharted directions for this theory—especially for youth development scholarship. I struggled to identify studies that truly utilized the social comparison theory as a basis for the development of research questions in studies with youth populations. The majority of the studies on body image that identify the Social Comparison Theory as a framework for their theoretical justification but do not truly utilize the theory's premises to drive the research questions. To remedy this, a grounded theory approach for future research is recommended. This will enable scholars to elaborate and expand on the process that occur in the development of body image.

Additionally, although the utilization of the theory is broad and diverse (Sulls & Wills, 1991) scholars have not fully explored the dimensions of the social comparison theory with youth populations (Warren, 2006). This is especially true as many of the studies lack socioeconomic, gender, and cultural diversity (Jones, 2001). This lack of heterogeneity must be addressed in order to generate interventions grounded in social scientific theory. Therefore, research associated with culturally perpetuated norms for both male and female populations is necessary.

Future research should also lend itself to further understanding these processes. Although the model presented in this study is necessary as a guide, the interworking of the social comparison processes are still relatively unexplored (Wood, 1996).

When addressed by research, these questions will aid in fulfilling the gaps in social continue to understand youth populations (both male and female) in this capacity Furthermore, the ethnic backgrounds of youth are important factors to note when examining social comparison processes because the literature has yet to fully explore how these differences occur. Beyond the addition to scholarship on body image and youth development, these questions serve to inform scholars interested in the Social Comparison theory how various subsectors of our population utilize and experience the comparative processes (Warren, 2006).

Specific to this population it is necessary to continue to examine the qualities and personality traits that enabled the participants in this study to formulate positive body images. This research indicates that their positive body image may be due to a realistic grasp of media ideals and an understanding of positive peer and friend relationships.

Although these conclusions are chiefly intended for academic populations, practitioners can also learn valuable lessons from this study since the relationship between youth and their friends/peers appear to be highly relevant to behavioral changes. This indicates that interventions may be necessary in order to teach youth to cultivate healthy relationships with their friends and peers in regards to body image formation. Media literacy may be another topic of interest for practitioners. Since youth in this study had a firm grasp of appearance ideals that were perpetuated by mass media as well as positive body image, proved that this

understanding has innumerable benefits when looking to negate the longstanding effects of the media.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Overall Conclusions

As noted the benefits of this study were twofold. Firstly, it was imperative that the stories and visual representations of the processes that take place within a community regarding body image were at the forefront of the research. This is largely due to the fact that these topics are still being explored at a microlevel and was a recommended strategy for further research on body image (Cash & Smolck 2011). Secondly, it was important for the youth who participated in this study to become empowered throughout the data collection process.

It is my belief that both of these aims were achieved. These achievements are outlined here as well as an overview of the compilation of findings, implications and recommendations for future research.

Overall it is known that body image and the media have been researched at great length. This study reveals that the focus of this research over time has been much specified in various areas and utilized multiple theoretical perspectives. These studies all noted the impactful effect media outlets have on adolescent females. Therefore the systematic review served to set the stage for the three articles that followed in order highlight the need for future research on media effects, strong theoretical underpinnings, and sociocultural factors. While media was the overreaching focus of this research, the need to understand sociocultural factors became exceedingly clear as the literature was reviewed in this systematic

manner. This is largely due to the fact that youth were found to increase their positive body image formations when utilizing information from parents and peers. These findings were further solidified as it became clear that many individual, family, and community characteristics helped the youth in this study formulate positive body image constructions.

Moreover, culturally relevant studies were recommended in the systematic review in order to shed light on the various ways in which body image is constructed in different communities and across various races (Duke, 2000; Duke, 2002). This was also glaringly clear as the populations studied in previous research were skewed in terms of ethnic diversity. This recommendation was also solidified as these articles revealed that different ethnic groups have different constructions of body image. This however, should be further explored in future research as the results here simply point in this direction but do not fully illustrate these processes.

In relation to mass media, youth in this study exemplified the challenges and struggles experienced in adolescence regarding body image. The current findings add to the understandings of various mass media outlets and their effect on body image construction. All youth in this study claimed to be satisfied with their body image and discussed the challenges, negotiations, and processes that aided them in finding body image satisfaction. This is refreshing as a great deal of body image literature focuses on body-dissatisfied individuals. Therefore it also becomes necessary to continue to teach media literacy to youth of anybody satisfaction status.

This point brings the author to the next recommended area for future research as there is little information about the processes that effect individuals with positive body image. Moreover, the final study also indicates that there is a need for further development of these processes. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to divulge how these processes work, which sociocultural factors most contribute to the formation of positive body image, and if there are personality differences that enable youth to formulate their own protective factors against negative body image messages in the media and throughout their day-to-day lives.

This research also sought to refine the model presented in Chapter One, Figure 1. Originally, it was thought that mass media was the overreaching factor in the formation of both positive and negative body image. Prior to the formation of body image it was postulated that social comparisons process intervened in addition to several sociocultural factors. However, after conducting this research, it is apparent that the mass media, although an affluent factor in the lives of youth, is not the overreaching variable as many other sociocultural factors contribute to positive body image as well as serve as protective factors against negative body image messages.

Since the research on positive body image is still fairly new to academia, the former model was constructed based on the research on body-dissatisfied individuals. Therefore, the author offers the following alterations to the model in order to accurately depict the processes that took place throughout the course of this study.

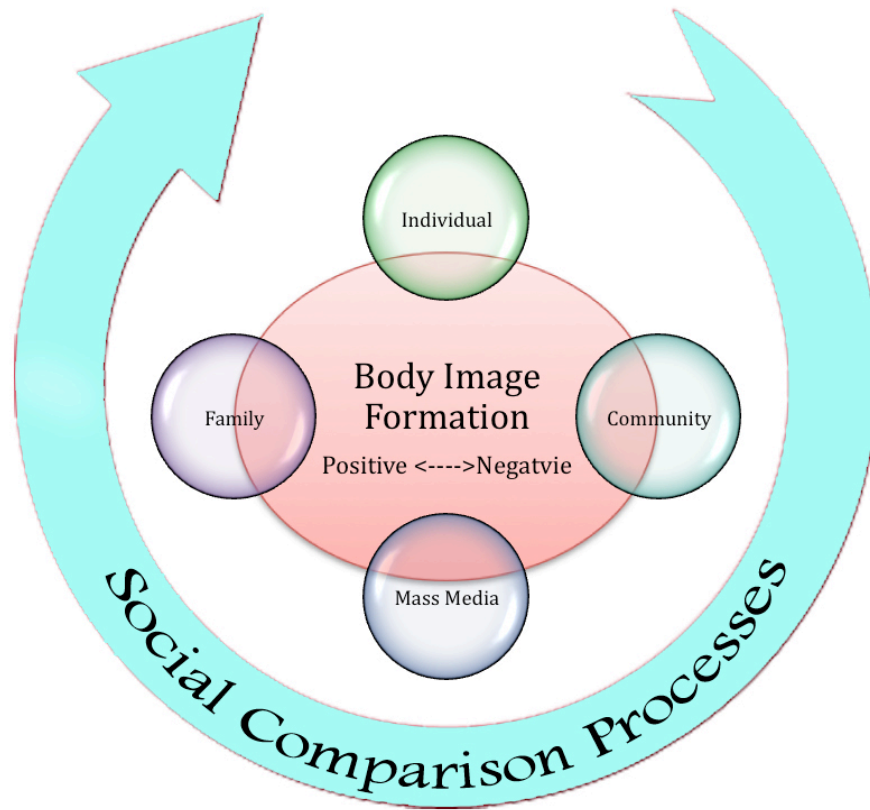


Figure 30. Sociocultural Formation of Body Image

This model differs from the original in many ways. First, mass media is included in the sociocultural factors that influence youth along with the individual, family, and community characteristics discussed throughout this research. Second, the researcher added a line between positive and negative body image as body image is confirmed as a *multi-dimensional* concept. Since it is known that body image isn't salient (Cash, 2004) and can change from day-to-day, the model should

reflect this spectrum. Participants in this study also exemplified this process as they were overall satisfied with their body image but still discussed struggles and threats to their positive body image. Additionally, the model is the same as the original in several ways. First, the social comparison processes are still known to occur. This model acknowledges that these processes occur between all levels of interaction between the various sociocultural factors and although these processes warrant further development in regards to this population, they were still present throughout the course of the study. Nevertheless, these studies are still supported by other quantitative research and therefore, remain relevant to this model.

Future Recommendations

Based on the findings from Chapter One, it is necessary to continue to accurately understand the body of literature as it relates to these populations since recent focus has shifted away from adolescents and the media in the United States. These findings also related a need for understanding media in a sociocultural context. Although this study begins to do just that, further researcher on diverse populations is necessary. Since participants in this study gave a unique perspective of body image as pertaining to their lives and their culture, it is also necessary to continue to research these processes in quantitative studies in order to confirm findings. Additionally, further exploration of various cultural groups is necessary in order to continue to “un-skew” the body of research on these topics.

The researcher also believes that the most pertinent and tangible future research should utilize similar methodologies with the male population in order to compare and contrast these findings.

Implications and Contributions

Overall, it is necessary for researchers to continue to explore the issues raised by the participants in this study. These youth and their stories may serve as a model to determine the protective factors and personality traits that cause positive body image. Nevertheless, these findings confirmed many already discovered characteristics of positive body image such as acceptance of multiple body types and flexible standards of beauty. The sociocultural factors also served as protective factors in the development of negative body image. Therefore, these concepts should be utilized to implement interventions and health prevention curricula in order to combine sociocultural assets, positive body image characteristics, in addition to media literacy.

Strengths and Limitations

Photovoice methods present their own set of limitations as discussed throughout this study. Overall, this study may have contained certain biases due to the fact that one individual collected and analyzed data. Although these were accounted for in the overall reflexivity during data collection, the results and data were interpreted by one individual and were therefore highly dependent on the skills of the researcher. Additionally, the researcher's presence during data collection could have skewed the participant's results when discussing body

image—a highly sensitive topic. Along these lines, data was also self-reported and therefore may also contain biases from participants.

Nevertheless, the limitations are far outweighed by the strengths of this study since photovoice methodologies employed throughout this research project were inspiring and beneficial to youth participants and the community. Both communities and youth are multifaceted entities that can be transformed and enhanced and both topics have entire areas of scholarship and research devoted to their development and improvement. A relationship also exists between the two because when youth are organized within a community, positive and meaningful change for both can occur (Delgado, 2015). This has proven to be impactful because both bodies of literature have also found that youth participation in communities yields healthy behaviors and positive outcomes for not only the youth involved but the communities as a whole (Barnett & Kumaran, 2012).

Since youth were historically seen in a negative light (Delgado 2015; Zeldin, & Leidheiser, 2014) this type of involvement beings to show the community the potential youth have. This is integral as youth have the capacity to engage their communities for long periods of time and therefore can prove to be a valuable tool when organizing a community (Barnett, & Kumaran, 2012). In the context of this study, youth participation was considered a “process of involving young people in situations and decisions that affect their lives” (Checkoway and Gutierrez, 2011; p. 341). Therefore, youth were empowered to voice their opinions about these issues in regards to their lives as well as their community. Although

youth had a different definition of community in this context, they were able to pinpoint individuals that should be invited to the forthcoming community event. This alone serves to empower youth to think critically about the individuals who affect their lives and begin to consider their role as future community members.

These methods have been noted with great success as youth feel a sense of belonging and trust when adults seek and employ their ideas (Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2008) and this study appeared to be no exception. Youth were overwhelming excited and even thankful to take part in this project. When asked to reflect on this project one girl said, “Doing this project shows that they aren’t the only ones that have problems and there are more people that have problems that they don’t want to share because they are too afraid to.”

The girls from Bryan Independent School District also experienced a pervasive bonding moment through this experience and found even greater acceptance regarding body image throughout the sharing circle process. To illustrate one girl said “you think everyone is looking at it but remember we don’t care in this room,” and “it made me feel good about myself because now I know I’m not the only one that feels this way about themselves.”

Youth also found new skills in taking photos through this project and claimed to have newfound confidence in many ways,

“That it was so cool. I had fun! It really let me show myself in different ways that I couldn’t even imagine. I loved it and I would want to do it again if I could. I really never took selfies like this I barely even took any. And

this way it really got me in a comfortable mood to take pictures with my friends and to start showing that I'm able that I can do things I couldn't do and I'm able to have fun and turn down for what!"

Departing Thoughts

Overall, this project was important to me in order to shed light on the processes and dynamics young girls experience when conceptualizing their body image. It is my firm belief that the Photovoice process was the most beneficial way to obtain this information. This was beneficial in many ways, but the most impactful way was the young girls and their growth throughout the project. The relationships and bonds formed between me and these youth was incredibly meaningful to me as well as the girls. It was important for the girls to think about body image in a new way and utilizing selfies, was a valuable tool to encourage these thoughts. Overall, the girls were also impacted by each other during the sharing circles. Since they were able to discuss many empowering thoughts regarding acceptance and body image satisfaction, those who maybe struggling with body image issues were able to consider that they were not alone in these thoughts. This was powerful in order to allow the girls to continue to perpetuate healthy conversations with each other about these topics outside of the project's scope and timeline.

The next step is to plan a social event with all of the girls at the Lincoln Recreation Center. This will be a time for the youth to present their photographs to parents, friends, and community members. This is of course, the final step of

Photovoice and is an integral step to empowering the youth in their community in regards to body image. Overall, it is the hope that this project will be a impactful model for future body image research and community outreach in regards to this ever-evolving and important topic.

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APPENDIX A- INTRODUCTION – CONSENT/ASSENT SCRIPT

Hello! My name is Amy Dromgoole and I am a graduate student at Texas A&M University. What's your name? It's nice to meet you!

At this point the researcher will engage the youth participants by asking the following appropriate questions: *Did you do anything fun during your Christmas break? Do you like your teachers? What do you do for fun?*

Let's get started! I'm excited that you're interested in hearing about this project. I am trying to learn about how girls your age think about their body image and how the media and your daily life can effect your body. Body image is the mental picture you have of your body plus your thoughts and feelings about this picture. This project will help me to better understand how teens like you experience, perceive, and interpret the world around them in regards to body image.

If you decide to participate, we will meet 4 more times.

Session 1- The first time we meet you will be asked to take a short survey about the amount of media you use each day. There will be 7 questions and will take about 10 minutes to complete. At this time you and I will sit down one-on-one to talk about body image more in-depth. This interview will consist of approximately 5 questions (with possible follow up questions) and will last about 15 minutes. You will also be taking selfies for this project to help tell the story of your daily life. Therefore, during this session we will also talk about taking good photographs and what photos are appropriate for this project. You will also tell me your preferred way to take photos. You may use your own camera or phone or I can provide you with a camera to use and show you how to use it. This first session will take between 1 and 1 1/2 hours.

Session 2- After 10 days we will meet again in order for me to get the photos from you (if you use a disposable camera that I provide). If you use your phone, you may email me the photos after 10 days. There is not a required amount of photos you must take but you are encouraged to take at least 2 eachday for 10 days.

Session 3- Then we will meet again to do sharing circles. The sharing circle session will take between 1 to 1 1/2 hours. During this time you will tell me and the group about your photos.

Session 4- Finally, we will meet one more time at a community event where you will show off your work. This event will be planned with your help and feedback

and will offer you the opportunity to share with your community your photos and ideas that came from our sharing circles.

Participating in this project can be fun but you are of course able to leave the project at any time without penalty. You will not be compensated for participating. Do you have any questions about the study or what you would be asked to do if you decide to be in the study? I would like for you to be in the study, but you don't have to be. The choice is yours. Do you have any questions about the study?

Answer any questions the child may have.

After this is complete I will ask: *Would you like to be in the study?*

- A verbal indication of “yes” will indicate assent granted. If child indicates they do not want to be in the study by verbally denying, they will immediately be thanked for their time and released back to their regular activities. If they decide later that they don't want to be in the study, they may stop taking the seven-question survey. They do not need to say anything to me either. They may simply put your writing utensil down at anytime.
 - *Thank you for talking with me. I understand your decision. You may return to your regular activity now.*
- If child says yes, I will reinforce they can stop at any time.
 - *You can decide that you want to be in the study now, and change your mind later. If you decide later that you don't want to be in the study, you may stop taking the seven-question survey. You do not need to say anything to me either. You may simply put your writing utensil down at anytime. If you decide you don't want to do the interviews or sharing circles that's okay too, just let me know or simply say, “pass” and you will be allowed to return to your regular activities.*

At this time parents and youth will be provided with all relevant information sheets/consent forms/etc. They will be allowed to review this information and ask any questions.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE - *AFTER CONSENT/ASSENT* – SESSION

MEDIA CONSUMPTION, BODY IMAGE, AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Hi! Good to see you again. How are you today? Did you get a chance to read over the information sheet? Do you have any more questions?

Answer any questions the child may have.

Remember, you can decide that you want to be in the study now, and change your mind later. If you decide later that you don't want to be in the study, you may stop taking the seven-question survey. You do not need to say anything to me either. You may simply put your writing utensil down at anytime. If you decide you don't want to do the interviews or sharing circles that's okay too, just let me know or simply say, "pass" and you will be allowed to return to your regular activities.

If there are no more questions, let's review what I am asking you to do one more time. Today you will be asked to complete a survey. It has 7 questions and will take about 10 minutes to complete. This survey will be helpful in telling me about your own experience with the media as well as some questions that will help me get to know you a little better. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

We will then sit down one-on-one to talk about body image more in-depth. This interview will consist of approximately 5 questions (with possible follow up questions) and will last about 15 minutes.

You will also be taking selfies for this project to help tell the story of your daily life. Therefore, during this session we will also talk about taking good photographs and what photos are appropriate for this project. You will also tell me your preferred way to take photos. You may use your own camera or phone or I can provide you with a camera to use and show you how to use it. This first session will take between 1 and 1.5 hours.

Allow youth to respond. Distribute survey, conduct interviews, and photograph training.

Name: _____

1. Please estimate the number of hours you watch television (includes Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, etc.) during the following time periods:

6 a.m. to noon: _____

Noon to 6 p.m. _____

6 p.m. to midnight _____

Midnight to 6 a.m. _____

2. Please estimate the number of hours you read magazines (sports, fashion, etc.) during the following time periods:

6 a.m. to noon: _____

Noon to 6 p.m. _____

6 p.m. to midnight _____

Midnight to 6 a.m. _____

3. Please estimate the number of hours you spend on social media outlets (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, SnapChat, etc.) during the following time periods:

6 a.m. to noon: _____

Noon to 6 p.m. _____

6 p.m. to midnight _____

Midnight to 6 a.m. _____

4. Overall, how would you rate your current satisfaction with your body?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know

5. Overall, how important is appearance to you?

- Very Important
- Somewhat important
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant
- Don't know

6. What is your age? _____ years.

7. What race do you consider yourself to be?

- African American/Black
- Asian
- Caucasian/White
- Latin/Hispanic
- Other _____

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS –
MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND BODY IMAGE

1. **Do you think body image is a concern for adolescent females in today's society? Explain.**
2. **Do you ever have body concerns? Explain.**
3. **How would you describe as an ideal body?**
4. **What are your feelings about your body?**
5. **Where do you receive your messages about body image?**
 - *If youth mention media images the following questions may be appropriate:*
 - a. What type of media influences you most?
 - i. Can you give me an example?
 - b. How do these images influence how you feel about your body?
 - c. Do you compare yourself to these images?
 - i. How?
 - ii. Why?
 - d. Do you think these images influence your own behavior in any way?
 - i. In what ways specifically? Please explain.
 - *If youth mention community/family/friends the following questions may be appropriate:*
 - a. In what ways does your community/family/friends influence your body image?
 - i. How?
 - ii. Why?
 - b. Do you compare yourself to people in your community/your family/your friends?
 - i. How?
 - ii. Why?
 - c. Do you think your community/family/friends influences your own behavior in any way?
 - i. In what ways specifically? Please explain.

APPENDIX C: PHOTOGRAPH TRAINING GUIDE -SESSION 1 – PHOTOGRAPH TRAINING

The inspiration for this project is the media as well as your daily life. Girls your age are interested in taking photos of yourself and your friends, posting them online, commenting on others' photos, and viewing your friends' profiles. Girls your age also like to read magazines, watch the latest TV shows, and listen to music. All of these things can influence how you view your body and how satisfied you are with your overall appearance. I am interested in learning more about this by seeing your life through the pictures you take of yourself.

In this project you will be taking “selfies.” We will not be including anyone else in our photos because this project is about you and your experiences. You are not required to take a certain number of photographs but are encouraged to take at least 2 photos each day for 10 days.

At the end of the 10-day period, you will meet me with the camera or will email the photos to amy.dromgoole@tamu.edu. You may send more than one email if photos are too large to send in one email. Please let me know how many emails to expect so I can ensure that I receive all of your photographs. I will alert you that I have received each email when it arrives.

I am also going to hand out a one-page information sheet with a list of things to consider when taking photos.

Review the information sheet with the group.

Worth a Thousand Words: Ideas to consider when taking photos

These are not questions you must answer but just some items to consider during the next 10 days. This will help you begin thinking about the way your daily life effects how you think about your body.

1. From your experience and knowledge, what does the healthy body and body image mean?
2. What does a healthy body mean to your community, your friends, your family and your culture?
3. What does “being healthy” mean to you?
4. What do you think a healthy body looks like? Has this idea changed over time?
5. What influences how you think about your body?
6. Given your experiences what do you think youth should know about healthy body and body image?
7. How can we help youth to better understand their bodies and healthy body perceptions?
8. From your experience and knowledge, what do you think good strategies might be to encourage wellness regarding healthy body and body image?
9. What are some barriers you face in achieving and maintaining healthy body and body image?

Ideas on what you can take photos of:

1. Places you go
2. Food you eat
3. Your current home or room
4. What you do during the day and on the weekends
5. Something you really like / dislike

You are not limited to these ideas. Be creative! This is about telling your story!

If you have questions during this project, please contact me at 979-587-9600 or amy.dromgoole@tamu.edu. Thank you for participating!

APPENDIX D: PHOTOGRAPH TRAINING GUIDE (CONT.)- SESSION 1 –

PHOTOGRAPH TRAINING

Are there any questions about what you will be taking photos of?

Allow youth to answer/ask questions.

Your safety and reputation are priority when taking these photos. Taking a photo is like writing something with a sharpie marker in that it never goes away! Therefore, you must consider several things when taking selfies.

Discuss items on the information sheet.

Are there any questions about what type of photographs are appropriate?

Allow you to answer/ask questions.

We also want you to take good photographs that we can talk about later and show off at our community event. To help you with this I will now hand out a sheet for you with some rules and guidelines when it comes to taking photos.

Discuss items on the information sheet.

Are there any questions about how to take good photographs?

Allow you to answer/ask questions.

Worth a Thousand Words: Rules and Guidelines

Taking appropriate photos:

- 1. No one else is allowed in your photos.**
 - This is to protect your, your friends, your family, and people you may not know.
- 2. Please only take photos at appropriate times.**
 - Taking photos during class, church, or when adults are speaking is not respectful. There will always be time later to take your photos.
- 3. If you are taking photos of your clothes or body, please be in dress code as outlined by your school and/or parents.**
- 4. If you are in a uniform from a sports team or a pair of shorts/tank top/etc. on the weekend, that is okay but ask your parents first. It is important that we protect your reputation when taking photos.**
 - If you think the photo may be inappropriate, please ask your parents or an adult before turning it into me.
- 5. Consider the background of your photos.**
 - Please do not take photos of any media, television shows, social networking sites, etc.
 - You may take photos of public spaces but be sure there are no indicators that would tell someone where you are (street signs, location markers, etc.). Remember, your safety and privacy comes first!
- 6. If you take photos of something other than your face please consider appropriateness.**
 - You may take photos of your hands, feet, eyes, etc.
 - You may NOT take photos of your cleavage, buttocks, etc.

Worth a Thousand Words: Rules and Guidelines for taking photos

3 steps to taking good photos:

1. Choose a focal point

- You are of course the subject in the photo but be sure you are highlighting your focal point. For example, If you decide to take a selfie to show off a new haircut or something you are doing (like playing basketball) make sure that you frame the photo in a way that highlights the desired subject.

2. Capture a good angle

- Instead of taking the picture head-on, experiment with different angles. Try turning your head a few degrees to the right or left. You can also try holding the camera slightly higher than your head to get a different point of view.

3. Find the right lighting

- Having a solid light source is an essential part of taking any photograph and selfies are no different. If you try to take a selfie in a poorly lit area or one with harsh lighting, it won't turn out the way you want it to.
- Natural light is the most realistic lighting, so try to take your selfie near a window or outdoors.
- Natural light is not always possible. If that's the case, try turning on a lamp or other lights in the room to make your photo easier to see.

APPENDIX E: RETRIEVING PHOTOGRAPHS - SESSION 2 –

PHOTOGRAPH RETRIEVAL

Youth will meet me after 10 days to return the disposable cameras.

In person script:

Thank you for providing me with these photos! I am excited to hear you share your photos and ideas in our sharing circles with the group in our next session, which will take place on _____. I will develop these photos and bring them to our next session! Do you have any questions? Thank you for participating!

Youth may also email amy.dromgoole@tamu.edu with the photographs they take.

E-mail script:

Thank you for providing me with these photos! I am excited to hear you share your photos and ideas in our sharing circles with the group in our next session, which will take place on _____. I will develop these photos and bring them to our next session! If you have questions, please contact me at 979-587-9600 or amy.dromgoole@tamu.edu. Thank you for participating!

APPENDIX F: SHARING CIRCLES

Thank you for returning for our sharing circle today! We will have a sharing circle to allow you tell the group about your photos and build on your great feedback from your interviews. Today we will talk further about their ideas of body image and your daily life.

Remember, body image is the mental picture you have of your body plus your thoughts and feelings about this picture. Please reflect on the meaning of this concept before answering today's questions.

Let's get started. I'd like to first learn about all of the pictures you have taken, but I'd also like to know about the ones that are the most important or meaningful to you so we can decide which ones to display at our community event.

- 1. Let's go around the circle. Each person will start by telling me about all of the pictures (the collection as a whole) in relation to how do they contribute to your meanings of body image. Remember, we are only talking about the collection of photos at this time. We will have more time later to talk about each photo individually in a moment.*

Allow youth to answer question.

That was great information! Now you can talk about individual photos or groups/pairs of photos when answering these next questions.

- 1. Which pictures did you most identify with?**
- 2. Which pictures tell the most about your body image? Explain.**
 - i. Why did you take these pictures?**
 - ii. Tell me more about what's in these pictures?**
- 3. Was there anything you would have liked to photograph that you were unable to? Explain.**
- 4. Which photos would you most like to share with others in our community? Explain.**

- i. Here youth will select the photos to be presented in the community display. There is not a limit of how many photos they can present.**
- 5. Are there any photos you would prefer not to share with other people?**
- 6. What did you think of this process?**
 - i. Was it empowering to be able to express yourself by taking photos?**
- 7. Are there any other thoughts or ideas that you've had that you would like to share?**

This has been a great process and I appreciate all the work you've done. We will meet one more time to allow you show off your photos at a community event at _____ from ____ pm - ____ pm. I have invited _____ based on your initial feedback so come prepared to share your work and tell your story!

APPENDIX G: PARENT CONSENT FORM

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Project Title: Worth a Thousand Words: Conceptualizing Adolescent Female Body Image Through Photovoice

Your child is invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Amy Dromgoole, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you and your child decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to allow your child to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this permission form. If you decide you do not want your child to participate, there will be no penalty to you or your child, and your child will not lose any benefits they normally would have.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors in adolescent female's environment that influence their body image in order to support the development of youth led initiatives appropriate for young people.

Why is My Child Being Asked to Be in This Study?

Your child is being asked to be in this study because you/your child is female and between the ages of 11 and 14 years old and live in the Bryan/College Station area.

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?

21 people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study locally. Overall, a total of 7 people will be invited at 3 study centers.

What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?

The alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

What Will My Child Be Asked To Do In This Study?

Session 1- The first time we meet you child will be asked to take a short survey about the amount of media you use each day. There will be 7 questions and will take about 10 minutes to complete. At this time your child and I will sit down one-on-one to talk about body image more in-depth. This interview will consist of approximately 5 questions (with possible follow up questions) and will last about 15 minutes. Your child will also be taking selfies for this project to help tell the story of their daily life. Therefore, during this session we will also talk about taking good photographs and what photos are appropriate for this project. Your child will also tell me your preferred way to take photos. She may use your own camera or phone or I can provide her with a camera to use and show you how to use it. This first session will take between 1 and 1 ½ hours.

Session 2- After 10 days we will meet again in order for me to get the photos from your child (if you use a disposable camera that I provide). If she uses her phone, she may email me the photos after 10 days. There is not a required amount of photos she must take but she is encouraged to take at least 2 each day for 10 days.

Session 3- Then we will meet again to do sharing circles. The sharing circle session will take between 1 to 1 1/2 hours. During this time your child will tell me and the group about her photos.

Version Date:

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IRB NUMBER: IRB2014-0805
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/05/2015
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 01/01/2016

**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM
PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM**

Session 4- Finally, we will meet one more time at a community event where she will show off her work. This event will be planned with your child's help and feedback and will offer your child the opportunity to share with the community her photos and ideas that came from our sharing circles.

Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of My Child during the Study?

The only photos will be those provided by the youth.

Are There Any Risks To My Child?

The things that your child will be doing are no more than risks than she would come across in everyday life. We will however, be discussing body image which can be a sensitive topic for girls. Although the researcher has tried to avoid risks, she may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. She does not have to answer anything she do not want to. Also, although youth may elect to utilize a pseudonym, their likeness may still be recognizable if photos are released.

Are There Any Benefits To My Child?

It is the hope that by being in this study your child will be empowered to share her story with people in your community.

Will There Be Any Costs To My Child?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will My Child Be Paid To Be In This Study?

Your child will not be paid for being in this study.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?

The records of this study will be kept private. However, the nature of the study and the event in session 4 will not allow for the study to be completely confidential. Your child may however opt out of participating in the community event if you wish for your photos to remain private in that aspect. Your child may also choose to choose a pseudonym (i.e. fictitious name) in order to remain anonymous. Your child will however, be taking selfies, which will allow you to be identifiable in the photos. You and your child will have the opportunity to sign a photograph release allowing the researcher to publish the photos. You and your child may choose to not release these photos to me if you wish them to remain confidential to the public. If you choose not to release the photos there will be no penalty to you or your child and only the Principal Investigator and research study personnel will see them.

Research records will be stored securely and only the Principal Investigator and Amy Dromgoole will have access to the records. Information about your child will be stored on computer files protected with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

People who have access to your child's information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Version Date:

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IRB NUMBER: IRB2014-0805
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/05/2015
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**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM
PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM**

Who may I Contact for More Information?

You may contact the Principal Investigator, Chris Boleman, PhD to tell him/her about a concern or complaint about this research at 979-845-6533 or ctboleman@tamu.edu. You may also contact the Protocol Director, Amy Dromgoole at 979-587-9600 or amy.dromgoole@tamu.edu

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to allow your child to be in this research study. Your child may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If they choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on their student status or relationship with the program.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

The procedures, risks, and benefits of this study have been told to me and I agree to allow my child to be in this study. My questions have been answered. I may ask more questions whenever I want. I do not give up any of my child's or my legal rights by signing this form. A copy of this consent form will be given to me.

Child's Name

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature

Date

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature

Date

Version Date:

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IRB NUMBER: IRB2014-0805
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/05/2015
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**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM
PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM**

PHOTO RELEASE

Parent/Guardian #1:

_____ (initial) I **give** my permission for photographs to be made of my child during my participation in this research study.

_____ (initial) I **do not give** my permission for photographs to be made of my child during my participation in this research study.

Parent/Guardian #2:

_____ (initial) I **give** my permission for photographs to be made of my child during my participation in this research study.

_____ (initial) I **do not give** my permission for photographs to be made of my child during my participation in this research study.

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the parent the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

Signature of Presenter

Date

Printed Name

Date

Version Date:

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IRB NUMBER: IRB2014-0805
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/05/2015
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 01/01/2016

APPENDIX H: MINOR ASSENT FORM

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM MINOR'S ASSENT FORM

Project Title: Worth a Thousand Words: Conceptualizing Adolescent Female Body Image Through Photovoice

I'm excited that you're interested in learning about this project. I am trying to learn about how girls your age think about their body image and how the media and your daily life can effect your body. Body image is the mental picture you have of your body plus your thoughts and feelings about this picture. This project will help me to better understand how teens like you experience, perceive, and interpret the world around them in regards to body image.

If you decide to participate, we will meet 4 more times.

Session 1- The first time we meet you will be asked to take a short survey about the amount of media you use each day. There will be 7 questions and will take about 10 minutes to complete. At this time you and I will sit down one-on-one to talk about body image more in-depth. This interview will consist of approximately 5 questions (with possible follow up questions) and will last about 15 minutes. You will also be taking selfies for this project to help tell the story of your daily life. Therefore, during this session we will also talk about taking good photographs and what photos are appropriate for this project. You will also tell me your preferred way to take photos. You may use your own camera or phone or I can provide you with a camera to use and show you how to use it. This first session will take between 1 and 1 ½ hours.

Session 2- After 10 days we will meet again in order for me to get the photos from you (if you use a disposable camera that I provide). If you use your phone, you may email me the photos after 10 days. There is not a required amount of photos you must take but you are encouraged to take at least 2 each day for 10 days.

Session 3- Then we will meet again to do sharing circles. The sharing circle session will take between 1 to 1 1/2 hours. During this time you will tell me and the group about your photos.

Session 4- Finally, we will meet one more time at a community event where you will show off your work. This event will be planned with your help and feedback and will offer you the opportunity to share with your community your photos and ideas that came from our sharing circles.

Participating in this project can be fun but you are of course able to leave the project at any time without penalty. You will not be compensated for participating. Do you have any questions about the study or what you would be asked to do if you decide to be in the study? I would like for you to be in the study, but you don't have to be. The choice is yours. Do you have any questions about the study?

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You do not have to be in this research study and you can stop at any time. If you have any questions, you can talk to your parents, your regular doctor, the study doctor, or the person talking to you about this form.

Do you have any questions? Do you want to be in this research study?

Minor's Name

Minor's Signature (if applicable)

Date

Presenter's Signature

Date

PHOTO RELEASE

Student

_____(initial) I **give** my permission for photographs to be made of myself during my participation in this research study.

_____(initial) I **do not give** my permission for photographs to be made of myself during my participation in this research study.

If signed assent is not obtained, provide the rationale below:



APPENDIX I: ADDITIONAL METHODS

Role of the Researcher

When studying how adolescent females construct their body image, it was important for the researcher to constantly be aware of her position within the research in order to negate any biases, values, and experiences that may shape results. This type of critical self-reflection is also known as reflexivity, and was employed throughout this study (Creswell, 2013).

My research position was centered on my personal experiences, values, and biases. The way one views the world (myself included) is very dependent on the social constructions laid out throughout one's lifetime. Due to this, it is nearly impossible, to come to a complete understanding or truth when as humans we are genetically predisposition to be subjective and hold certain beliefs within ourselves. Therefore, my experiences in working with young people called for a constant reflexive process during the research process. To achieve this the researchers was constantly aware of her own beliefs, values, culture, and history in order to formulate a reflexive assessment of the abovementioned factors and sought to answer the research questions outlined in order to explain the expected casual links in real-life that are too complex for a survey or other quantitative analysis to explain.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of body image and the sensitivity youth may have to topic, it was important to exercise proper ethical considerations related to youth. In order to ensure proper precautions were taken when researching human subjects, both procedural and situational ethics were considered. In this case procedural ethics are considered the rules and regulations of each respective university. Consent for this project was granted Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University (IRB# 2014-0805). Additionally, throughout the study the researcher remained sensitive to these issues and engaged procedural and situational ethics to ensure that as a human instrument, cautious and responsible behaviors were exhibited.

The second dimension, situational ethics, is not as palpable as the above-mentioned procedural ethics. This dimension takes into consideration the often-subtle moments that occur in the field while researching. Specific to this study, the situational dimension presented itself in the form of gender and cultural differences between the researcher and the participants' community.

To properly understand this concept it is imperative to understated that “communities are not places that researchers enter but are instead a set of negotiations that inherently entail multiple and often conflicting interests” (Minkler, 2005, p. 8). It is common with community researcher for communities that are already facing problems to feel stigmatized and marginalized by research. This dynamic has been noted in various forms of health research. Therefore, when considering health topics such as body image,

ethical considerations must be taken into extra considerations as researchers have historically left communities feeling over-researched, misled and coerced. Finally, researchers often put communities in a position for these damaging effects if they do not give back to communities, do not share their findings with community members, and most commonly, fail to build capacity within communities (Flicker et al., 2007).

Furthermore, researchers must remain constantly aware of the balances between communities, youth, and the research. Although procedural ethics are outlined by each respective university, procedures do not always account for the abovementioned considerations. Therefore, the following “best practices,” developed by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) are recommended in order to ensure that the proper attention is paid to the expected emotional and cognitive processes for youth populations.

Modifications and steps for fulfillment are also outlined below:

1. **Provide and review with participants a consent form:** A parent consent form was utilized and approved by Texas A&M’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix F). Also, a minor assent form was utilized and approved by Texas A&M’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix G).
2. **Provide an “Acknowledgment and Release” consent form on which participants obtain the signatures of the people they photograph:** Youth were instructed during the photo training to only photograph herself or those participating in the project to ensure that photograph releases were obtain for anyone photographed.

3. **Frame the first training around a group discussion about the use of cameras, power, and ethics, emphasizing safety and the authority and responsibility that come with using a camera:** See Appendix C.
4. **Provide written material (such as a brochure that describes the goals of the Photovoice project, who will participate, how photographs will be used, and whom to contact for more information) that participants can give to subjects or interested community members:** See Appendix C, F and G.
5. **Provide a letter for youth or adult participants to give teachers and school principals or employers as applicable regarding the goal and duration of the project and establish whether and how cameras will be used at school or work:** Youth were instructed to not take photos during times that would be disruptive to school and work activities. Since each site was unique the need to inform others of the project was minimal.
6. **Provide participants with prints to give back to people they have photographed:** Youth were returned the photos after proper data analysis procedures.
7. **Provide and review with participants a consent form indicating permission to publish any photographs, or only specified photographs, to promote project goals, regardless of whether required by the facilitators' sponsoring institution:** Appendix F and G.
8. **Mentor project staff and participants on the ethical principles and actions underlying Photovoice:** No staff were utilized for this project. However youth

were informed of ethical considerations during the photograph training (Appendix C).

Population

The population of focus in this study is Brazos County. In 2013, the population of Brazos County was estimated at 203,164 with youth under the age of 18 making up 20.6% of this figure. 80.6% of the population identified as white, 11.3% identified as Black or African American and 24.5% identified as Hispanic or Latino. 22.4% claimed to speak a language other than English at home (most likely Spanish in many cases) and 30% of the population is considered to fall below the poverty line (U.S Census Bureau, 2013).

Wixon Valley 4-H Club. The Wixon Valley 4-H Club is one of over 20 community 4-H clubs in Brazos County. Brazos County 4-H hosts 592 4-H members and the Wixon Valley Club has approximately 50 of these members. Several Brazos County community clubs are project based (i.e only focus on one aspect of the 4-H program) however, the Wixon Valley 4-H Club is a multi-interest club with animal projects ranging from rabbits to commercial steers. Other projects include Junior Master Gardener Program, photography, consumer education, clothing, and foods & nutrition. Community service projects include: Relay for Life, international projects, food drives, and nursing home visitation. This club hosts nearly 100 youth 38 of these youth were in middle school and between the ages of 11 and 14. As of 2015, 63 females were enrolled. 93% of these youth identified as White (Texas 4-H, ES237).

Bryan Independent School District. Bryan Independent School District has 27 schools (4 middle schools and 5 high schools) and 15,624 students. 46.8% of these students identify as Hispanic or Latino (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Students from the sample in this study attend both Sam Rayburn Middle School and James Earl Rudder High School. Sam Rayburn Middle School has 805 students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and is considered a Title 1 teaching facility. 51% of students are female (N=413) and 30.3% of youth are in the 8th grade. James Earl Rudder High School has 1,228 students and also has Title 1 status. 46.6% of students are female (N=573) and 33% are in the ninth grade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

Lincoln Recreation Center. The Lincoln Recreation Center is a community recreation center and formerly the headquarters of the College Station Parks Department. Many amenities and services aimed at improving the quality of life of College Station residents are offered. Residents can take advantage of services in the areas of youth programming, senior services, special events, and community outreach. The facility includes a gymnasium, game room, fitness room, multipurpose room, zero depth water park, and a 13,000 square foot covered pavilion. After-school and summer programs are offered to resident and non-resident youth throughout the year. Estimations from the Lincoln Center state that approximately 150 youth—a majority are between kindergarten and sixth grade. 80% of youth served identify as African American/Black, 15% Hispanic and 5% White.

Building Quality Into The Study

Various verification strategies were utilized to ensure trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness is comprised of four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. This concept coincides with generalizability, in quantitative studies. In this study credibility is comparable to internal validity and is achieved when the researcher analyses the data in a reflexive process in order to judge the meanings and relevance of developing themes throughout the study. This was achieved here through constant reflexivity in order to ensure that the themes accurately depicted the experience of the participants. Credibility was also achieved by allowing participants to give feedback on their semi-structured interview transcripts--also known as member checking. In relation to external validity in quantitative researcher, transferability was achieved in this study by obtaining a purposeful sample from multiple and diverse sites. The sample chosen aimed to allow the reader to make a connection between this data and other contexts. Dependability, known as reliability in quantitative research, was achieved in this study by establishing an audit trail of all coded data (Appendix G). Finally, conformability was achieved by conducting peer-debriefings with faculty members. Peer debriefing is also known as analytic triangulation and is achieved when disinterested peers are engaged in data interpretation process. Here, this was accomplished by soliciting feedback from two faculty members from the coded data, in order to ensure the thematic analysis was understandable and well interpreted (Cresswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).