

THE BODY IMAGES OF BLACK AND WHITE WOMEN
AT AN URBAN UNIVERSITY

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“God give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” My Grandmother Schaub sent this prayer to me on a locket during my high school years. It spoke to my heart immediately and from that day forward, I would see the prayer appear in various locations: encouraging cards, balloons, bookmarks, and flyers. My Introduction to Sociology class was taken in high school with some of my best friends and one of the most charming teachers, Mrs. Rosemary Edens. I hold a special place in my heart for her encouragement in this course and my instant love for Sociology. Thank you, Mrs. Edens.

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Family is defined by each person’s perspective and life experiences. My family has consisted of individuals that have entered and passed through my life. These individuals have influenced my character and shown love and faith in my ability. Grant

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ABSTRACT

Sarah M Vincent

THE BODY IMAGES OF BLACK AND WHITE WOMEN AT AN URBAN UNIVERSITY

This thesis examined the body images of Black and White women at an urban university. Self perception of body image may be positive or negative, healthy or unhealthy, and may be influenced by various factors. Qualitative interviews were completed with eight Black and eight White non-Hispanic female college students. A common theme emerged regarding images of beautiful and ideal bodies. The women held similar standards of beauty for White and Black women with one exception: White women were expected to be thinner whereas Black women were expected to be heavier. In addition, the women were of a common mind with regard to the influence of men, fashion, and relationships with female family members on their body images. Racial differences emerged when the women discussed male perceptions of female bodies. Women of both races believed that racial and ethnic minority men were more accepting of women with diverse body types than were White men. Familial influences on body image included the mother-daughter relationship and a new finding of the sister-sister relationship. Finally, an emergent and unexpected finding centered on a woman's history of sexual and physical abuse. Each of the six women who experienced sexual or physical abuse reported some level of negative body imagery. These findings are discussed in the context of the existing body image literature and recommendations are made regarding directions for future research.

Carrie E Foote-Ardah, Chair

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INTRODUCTION

The pressures to have bodies that conform to very particular idealized images, and the disjunction between such images and those that women actually embody, may easily place women at risk with respect to their physical and mental health. In general, the female population has reported feeling far more pressure to be physically thin than the general male population and, consequently, they sustain considerably more negative “body images” (Fallon and Rozin 1985; Morrison et al 2004; Snooks and Hall 2002; Tiggemann and McGill 2004). This drive for thinness is understood to stem from the influence of the media, family, and friends (Paquette and Raine 2004; Tiggemann and McGill 2004; Weeden 2005; Franko 2005).

The health effects reported by women who have poor body images are depression, eating disorders, and lowered self-esteem (Altabe 1996; Carr and Friedman 2005; Franko and Mintz 2005; Hebl et al 2004; Johnson and Wardle 2005; Paquette and Raine 2004; Phan and Tylka 2006; Pike and Rodin 1991; Souza and Ciclitira 2005). Interestingly, Black¹ women have higher obesity rates than do White women yet, White women are less satisfied with their bodies than are Black women (Baturka et al 2000 and Altabe 1996). Consistent with this, studies have reported differences in body image and body weights among women of diverse racial backgrounds, and they have found differences in the negative health consequences that may develop from the negative perceptions of one’s own body. However, qualitative studies lack comparisons of the meaning of

¹ The studies mostly refer to African American and White non-Hispanic women but some also include Black immigrant women from Africa and the non-Hispanic Caribbean nations. The present study included one Black immigrant women from Africa. None of the women were of Hispanic origin. Therefore, the study uses the terms Black to refer mostly to Non-Hispanic African American women but recognizes that a small minority of the women in the literature and present study may be of African or Non-Hispanic Caribbean origin. White refers to non-Hispanic White women.

personal body image by women of diverse racial backgrounds. Therefore, the goal of this study was to explore the body images of White and Black non-Hispanic women.

This study seeks to provide a greater understanding of these issues by using in-depth interviews to comprehend the personal meaning and health impact of body image for Black and White women between the ages of 18 and 39. For the purpose of this study, body image is defined as how a woman perceives her physical body. Perceptions of our own body image are developed through social interactions. We derive perceptions of our self through how others perceive us and these perceptions arise during social interactions with others such as the media, family, and friends (Cooley 1902; Charon 1995; Prus 1996). During interactions with others, we communicate and interpret how we believe the other person views us. Social interactions can negatively affect the body image of an individual, which then may have adverse physical or mental health consequences.

The primary research questions are: how do White and Black women define their own and other women's body image, what factors influence these definitions, and how do definitions of personal body image impact White and Black women's sense of self and physical and mental health outcomes? To answer these questions, I recruited 30 women (15 Black and 15 White) and did in-depth one-on-one interviews to gain their perspectives on body image and how their perspectives affected their well-being. A grounded theory analysis of the interview transcripts allowed for identifying themes and provided insights on the meaning and health impact of body image on women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature identified several important themes relevant to this study, including: (1) the importance of beauty in U.S. society, (2) the factors that affect body image such as gender, mass media messages, and interactions with the family, and (3) the health concerns of the population at risk for body image disorders: females of various ages and races.

I. Importance of Beauty within U.S. Society

Beauty, also known as physical attractiveness, can be understood as a status symbol within society. There is a large literature that examines the perception of beauty in Western culture and demonstrates how the physically attractive have a higher status than those who are considered unattractive (Webster and Driskall 1983; Udry 1977; Suitor and Carter 1999; Singh 2004; Mehrabian and Blum 1997; Cann 2001; Tucker and O'Grady 2001; Brown and Cash 2001; Weeden and Sabini 2005; Schafer and Keith 2001; Townsend and Levy 2001; Demarest and Allen 2000). Women who do not fit the ideal image of attractiveness and who therefore fail to attain the higher status that being labeled beautiful entails, often are at risk for body image disorders (Webster and Driskall 1983; Udry 1977; Suitor and Carter 1999; Singh 2004; Mehrabian and Blum 1997; Cann 2001; Tucker and O'Grady 2001; Brown and Cash 2001). Body image disorders range from having poor self-esteem to eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and overeating.

Western culture has constructed an ideal beauty type for women. For example, extensive research has shown that the majority of women perceive the ideal female body should be slightly underweight and that overweight women were considered the least

attractive (Weeden and Sabini 2005; Sutor and Carter 1999; Singh 2004; Mehrabian and Blum 1997; Cann 2001; Schafer and Keith 2001; Townsend and Levy 2001; Demarest and Allen 2000).

Individuals who are perceived as attractive are also thought to have other positive attributes such as enjoying better mental health, more friendliness, and more confidence (Webster and Driskall 1983; Udry 1977; Sutor and Carter 1999; Singh 2004; Mehrabian and Blum 1997; Cann 2001; Tucker and O'Grady 2001; Brown and Cash 2001).

Attractiveness can also be understood as a status symbol due to the benefits (e.g., financial, social) it confers, depending on the individual's level of beauty. For example, a quantitative study concluded that higher status White and Black women were more attractive than lower status women of the same race, and also had more attractive husbands (Udry 1977). By conceptualizing beauty (e.g., physical attractiveness) as a status symbol that is unequally distributed, this study raises several questions that seek to gain insight about the sources of this inequality such as: what socio-cultural factors influence body image, what populations are at risk, and what are the health consequences of those who are labeled beautiful versus those who are not?

II. Socio-Cultural Factors that Affect Body Image

It is important to understand the factors that affect body image, such as one's gender, mass media messages, and the nature of familial interaction because these factors may also contribute to health problems among the female population that is at risk for eating and body image disorders (Adams, Kimberly et al 2000; Fallon and Rozin 1985; Bay-Cheng et al 2002; Pompper and Koenig 2004; Schooler et al 2004; Goodman 2002; Holmstrom 2004; Lokken et al 2002; Vartanian et al 2001; Beato-Fernandez et al 2004;

Dring et al 2004; Wilson et al 2004; Harris 1995). Approximately 90% of anorexia nervosa and bulimia cases are females and among American females the number is increasing while the number of male cases decrease or remain stable (Fallon and Rozin 1985). Eating disorders are often attributed to poor body images and such negative images are more likely to exist among females than males. The section that follows examines body image differences among men and women and then provides a closer look at the effects of mass media and family.

Body Image Differences by Gender

Over the past twenty years there has been a decrease in weight among female Playboy models and among Miss America contestants (Fallon and Rozin 1985). In addition, studies report that women often have distorted body images when compared to men; women often perceive themselves to be heavier than they are and their perceptions of their ideal body weight is underweight (Fallon and Rozin 1985; Adams et al 2000; Demarest and Allen 2000). When women were asked to rate the female body type that males prefer, women often chose a body type that was substantially underweight. In contrast, when men were asked to choose the ideal body type of a woman, their choice was more often only slightly below normal weight (Fallon and Rozin 1985; Adams et al 2000; Demarest and Allen 2000). These findings suggest that the pressure for thinness can partly be explained by men's preferences. Another possibility is that women are misinformed regarding which body types men prefer. Thinness is promoted in the mass media and may incorrectly portray the male preference in regards to the female body.

Other researchers have compared men and women's dieting patterns. A qualitative study interviewed men on their experiences of dieting, health, and body

image. Men visited the doctor less, dieted less, and when dieting were more likely to use the support of family, peers, and spouse than women (Souza and Ciclitira 2005). Results also showed that homosexual males dieted more frequently and reported higher body dissatisfaction, but heterosexual males confided more in females while dieting and reported feeling pressured to diet due to health concerns like high blood pressure (Souza and Ciclitira 2005). The female participants reported dieting due to health concerns the least and had lower familial support. In sum, the literature suggests men and women's perspectives of their own and the opposite sex's body image often differs in the direction of women experiencing more distorted body images. In addition, the perception of how men perceive women may have a negative impact on women's body image.

Media Effects on Body Image

The media may also influence women's body image. Men are more likely to be judged upon their achievements and are represented in the mass media as masculine, strong, and in control of their weight (Souza and Ciclitira 2005). Examining the images of women in the media may help increase understanding of why some women develop a negative self-image.

Some quantitative studies have analyzed how the mass media can negatively affect the mood and increase body dissatisfaction of women when exposed to advertisements of thin women (Tiggemann and McGill 2004; Stice et al 1994; Holmstrom 2004; Pompper and Koenig 2004; Schooler et al 2004; Morrison et al 2004; Maltby et al 2005; Goodman 2002; Lokken et al 2002; Vartanina et al 2001; Green and Pritchard 2003; James et al 2001). There was a significant decrease in mood and an increase in body dissatisfaction among women when exposed to women's full body or

body parts of images in magazine advertisements (Tiggemann and McGill 2004). Another study theorized that women exposed to thin women in the media would experience an increase in dieting due to poor body imagery. The study concluded that the mass media was only one factor in body dissatisfaction and future research should consider expanding upon the influences of family and the opposite sex (Stice et al 1994).

Family Influences on Body Image

The importance of understanding the degree to which family influences body image is crucial. The family is a strong socializing force. The literature suggests that one important influential factor in the family is the mother-daughter relationship (Pike and Rodin 1991 and Wilson et al 2004; Mukai 1996). For example, mothers of daughters with eating disorders were more likely to encourage and pressure thinness. Mothers were also more critical of their daughter's weight than their own. The research on the mother-daughter relationship effect on negative body image, however, is limited. Future studies need to examine further the impact of the mother-daughter relationship and other family relationships, such as the sister-sister or father-daughter, on female body image.

This section provided relevant literature findings on a variety of social and cultural factors that are important to examine: gender differences, mass media, and family. The present study seeks to expand on these findings using qualitative research. In addition, it will address several gaps in the literature, including how other family relationships like the sister-sister relationship affects female body image.

III. Health Concerns of Populations at Risk

Some of the negative health outcomes of having a negative body image are stress, depression, body image disorders, and self harm (Johnson and Wardle 2005; Franko and

Mintz 2005; Altabe 1996; Phan and Tylka 2006; Snooks and Hall 2002; Pompper and Koenig 2004; Holmstrom 2004; Beato-Fernandez 2001; Dring et al 2004; Wilson et al 2004; Green and Pritchard 2003; James et al 2001; Falconer and Neville 2000; Edwards-Hewitt and Gray 1993). Two major populations are often cited in the literature as being at increased risk for body dissatisfaction and as a result negative health outcomes. These include adolescents and college women. Perceptions of body image and negative health outcomes that may result from a poor body image may also vary by a women's race.

Several studies have linked body image disorders with increased depression (Franko and Mintz 2005; Johnson and Wardle 2005; Wingood et al 2002). Some report that women diet to control the stress of weight, but that this can then lead to oversteering and result in clinical depression. When women fail in their diets; their body dissatisfaction increases along with depressive symptoms (Johnson and Wardle 2005). It is these depressive symptoms of body displeasure that may lead to women detesting their bodies and committing self harm like decreasing their food intake, self-cutting, or suicide (Franko and Mintz 2005).

An estimated 10%-30% of college women are at risk for developing an eating disorder while in college, and 1%-3% have an eating disorder previously to beginning their postsecondary education (Franko and Mintz 2005; Goodman 2002; Vartanian et al 2001; Edwards-Hewitt and Gray 1993). Differences also emerge among females depending on their racial background (Altabe 1996; Phan and Tylka 2006; Schooler 2004; Pompper and Koenig 2004; Snooks and Hall 2002; Bay-Cheng et al 2002; Goodman 2002; Beato-Fernandez 2004; Mukai 1996; Wingood et al 2002; James et al 2001; Falconer and Neville 2001; Demarest and Allen 2000; Harris 1995; Edwards-

Hewitt 1993). For example, Black women are often more satisfied with their weight than are White women (Altabe 1996). White and Hispanic American women report greater body dissatisfaction than Black and Asian American women (Altabe 1996 and Beato-Fernandez 2004). Asian American women who have high ethnic identity expressed a greater concern with their weight than those Asian Americans with a low ethnic identity (Phan and Tylka 2006). This may be due to Asian Americans with high ethnic identity not wanting to disappoint their families with their physical appearance (Phan and Tylka 2006). The possible reasoning behind this perception is that Asian families may place greater esteem on healthy physiques and may associate obesity with laziness.

The studies discussed above point to the importance of examining the meaning of body image among both White and non-White women, especially women in college. The findings from such a study could then be used to educate women of different races on the effects of body image from women who are similar to them.

IV. Pilot Findings

I conducted a small qualitative pilot study that focused on the body image of women of different races at an urban university campus in the fall of 2005. It was completed as part of a graduate level Qualitative Research Methods course. The goal of the study was to seek a deeper understanding of how women perceive their own body, who influences their perceptions of self and body, and how much of an impact do these perceptions have on an individual's life. A total of three female IUPUI students, all above the age of eighteen and White, completed one-on-one interviews. Each interview was transcribed and then analyzed using grounded theory analyses. The preliminary findings from this pilot study

identified several major themes including: 1) the impact of women's body image on self esteem, 2) identifying racial stereotypes of body types, and 3) stating the differences between society's expectations of the ideal body image for men and women.

My findings were supportive of previous research. The pilot study participants defined body image according to past experiences and influences of their interactions with men, their moms, and their sisters. Results also supported previous research in that the women identified several body type stereotypes according to a women's race and ethnicity. These include the idea that Black women to have big butts and hips, while White women had big breasts and blonde hair. In addition, the women perceived White females to more likely suffer from eating disorders than the women of any other race. All participants were White females that had some level of body image dissatisfaction. The way they felt perceived by others (negative or positive) either decreased or increased in correspondence with their body satisfaction level.

Overall, participants stated positive and negative personal experiences with body image. Mothers and/or indirectly men were the most influential individual level factor that impacted how they viewed their bodies. The media was identified as the most prominent socio-cultural external influence. Social realms of external influences include, but are not limited to, the mass media, the government, organizations (i.e. religious, political, or business), and places of employment. Internal socio-cultural factors consist of peer groups, family members, romantic partnerships, and the individual. Findings of this pilot study

conclude that all participants had problems with their body images; however, the women noted their problems varied day by day and were not chronic.

The gaps in the literature and the preliminary findings from my pilot study pointed to a number of questions that my thesis investigated. These questions included: how do women describe the meaning of personal body image from their perspective as a White or Black woman; what social and cultural factors (such as the media or family) impact their body image as well as the perspective of other women's body images, and how does their perception of their body image affect their emotional, mental, and physical well-being. To answer these questions, I conducted sixteen qualitative in-depth interviews with White and Black women who attended an urban University.

Study Significance

This study is significant for several reasons. *First*, my thesis project fills some of the gaps in the body image literature. It differs from other studies through providing an in-depth look of the body images among White and Black women while examining a variety of social and cultural factors (media, family, or other women) that may affect these body images. *Second*, this study will use grounded theory, a qualitative methodology approach. *Third*, this study is significant because it examined the body image experiences of women from their childhood to the present. The data from this research study can be used to help women recognize the problems that can result from having a negative body image. School counselors, teachers, parents, or support groups for women with body image disorders will find this information important when developing interventions to improve the body image and health outcomes of at-risk women.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This qualitative interview study was guided by an interpretive philosophy of science. Interpretive sciences assume that in order to adequately understand social life and the meaning of people's experiences, researchers must engage in face to face interaction with research participants and project oneself into their worlds (Prus 1996; Stryker 1980; Charon 1995). An interpretive science approach best fit this research project because this project sought to comprehend the meaning of body image from the perspective of women representing different racial backgrounds.

Guiding Theoretical Perspectives

While this study used a discovery oriented approach of exploratory methods, at the same time, the starting point of this open-ended approach derived from preliminary questions that emerged from the literature. I used the theories of symbolic interactionism, stigma, and multiracial feminism to help frame the study. These theories guided my conceptualization of the study and the construction of the interview questions. At the same time, I made sure to use open-ended questions to ensure the use of the theories did not constrain emergent findings.

Symbolic interactionism is a theory that understands social life in terms of on-going meaningful social interactions between members of society (Stryker 1980; Charon 1995). Definitions of the self arise from social interactions, and such definitions have consequences for people's behaviors. For example, the theory of symbolic interactionism guided me to examine how women's definitions of their body image emerge from societal and familial interactions. In addition, through social interactions, we are labeled by others based upon a variety of characteristics and circumstances. It is the

interpretation and meaning attributed to the label that affects our perception of self. For example, a participant from my pilot study explained how being “thin” most of her life affected her behavior when she reached puberty and gained weight (Vincent 2006). The negative attention towards her weight gain caused her to exercise and diet intensely but unsuccessfully being able to return to a size one or two. Another participant’s mother praised her for wearing children’s clothing and weighing eighty-eight pounds through her early twenties. Each participant explained the pressure to maintain the label of “thinness” and the measures they took to obtain it. These participants stated they felt ashamed for not remaining thin. Therefore, it is important to examine how body image labels emerge through interaction with others, and how such labels impact women’s body image.

Stigma theory explains how labels often lead to stigmatization of those who are negatively labeled and as a result such individuals are more likely to experience discrimination and decreased life chances (Link 2001 and Charmaz 2005).

Contemporary stigma theory defines stigma as a physical or social attribute that leads to one of the following: stereotypes, discrimination, labeling, and status loss (Major and O’Brien 2005; Link and Phelan 2001). The labeling of an ideal body type for women stigmatizes those who do not meet this ideal and may negatively impact women’s self esteem, which may lead to an increase in body image disorders. Symbolic interactionism and stigma theory help one see the role of social interactions and the negative consequences of stigmatizing labels that are derived from these interactions.

Multiracial feminist theory introduces the importance of examining race as part of the social construction of gender (Zinn and Dill 1996). The differences between multiracial feminism and earlier feminist theories such as standpoint theory are that the

earlier theories focus solely on the differences between men's and women's perspective, but do not address racial differences (Lorber 1998). Standpoint theory critiques previous research, science, and the medical community by stating that most research is conducted on men and by men. Women receive little attention in the research and women's perceptions are also neglected (Lorber 1998). The key importance of multiracial feminism is that it is important to examine the differences among women of different racial groups. Black women and White women may share the same gender, but White women are more privileged because of their race (Lorber 1998). This theory raises the importance of looking at differences among women. Therefore, this thesis recruited both White and Black women to compare their body image.

Researcher Role

Addressing issues of reflexivity in research is valuable to a researcher because it helps the investigator recognize, analyze, and understand how social background may affect the research study (Hesser-Biber and Yaiser 2004). Reflexivity takes into account that the researcher is a product of society, which could affect how the data is interpreted (Hesser-Biber and Yaiser 2004). A part of reflexivity is to know your researcher role as an insider or outsider (Spillett 2003; Hesser-Biber and Yaiser 2004). The insider role is that of a researcher who is already part of the group being studied and familiar with them while the outsider is neither. Both kinds of researcher roles have advantages and disadvantages for the research process.

I shared some insider characteristics with the women I studied. I am a young female White student researcher, age 24. Throughout most of my own life I have had a distorted body image. I have tried several dieting and exercising techniques that only

work for a short period of time. One of the advantages I brought to the study was that I more easily related emotionally to the participants' experiences. Though my race differed from that of the Black females, it turned out to have a positive research effect because these women then took on an expert role as they shared their experiences in detail to educate me. White female participants may have assumed I understood or had experienced their same body image situation and may have been inclined to be less detailed. To address this possible bias, I asked probing questions, open-ended questions, and stated, "No, you are the expert, please explain," to ensure they would provide rich explanations of their experiences.

My researcher role had some limitations. First, I conducted my thesis project on a topic that I experienced on a personal level for most of my life. To reduce researcher bias, I worked very closely with a faculty member who examined my line of questioning. I also tape-recorded the interviews and transcribed them verbatim which increased the accuracy of my interpretations about what the women said. Using grounded theory for data analyses helped me stay focused on the participant's words instead of imposing my own viewpoints on the data (Charmaz 2000). In order to help encourage participation, I reassured each participant that all interviews were confidential and I expressed interest in their own personal accounts. A benefit of assuring confidentiality was that it increased the data quality because participants were less likely to lie (Spillett 2003).

Sample

My research sample was initially composed of 30 female participants who met the eligibility guidelines. The participants were White and Black females between the ages of 18 and 39. I limited the sample to women between the ages of 18 and 39 in order

to eliminate those women who may experience pre-menopausal or post-menopausal conditions, factors which may also impair body image. I recruited fifteen White non-Hispanic and fifteen Black non-Hispanic women. However, I only conducted twenty-three interviews because seven of the qualified participants did not participate due to schedule conflicts or they simply did not show up for their scheduled interviews. Out of the twenty-three interviews, only sixteen were transcribed and used because of recording problems, time constraints, or lack of funds to transcribe all the interviews. After accounting for all of these circumstances, my final sample consisted of sixteen women; eight White and eight Black. Chart 1 reports some of the socio-demographics of the final sample. The women ranged in age from 21 to 39 and were predominantly heterosexual. The majority (N=12) were single. Their height ranged from 4'11" to 5'8" and their weight ranged from 120 to 245. The women described their body's using a wide range of adjectives including, petite, voluptuous, curvy, plump, pudgy, pear, curvaceous, normal, athletic, stinky, thick, and hippy. Most of the women did not have children.

My sample excluded men and all other women besides White and Black females. This decision was also justified by the literature that found significant differences between the body images of White and Black women (Altabe 1996; Baturka et al 2000; and Beato-Fernandez 2004). None of the women were of Hispanic origin and all but one of the Black women were African American. The sample included one immigrant Black woman from Africa.

I advertised the study and conducted all of the interviews on the IUPUI campus (See Flyer in the Appendix). There were several advantages to this recruitment strategy.

Being a student at IUPUI made it easy for me to advertise on campus and secure a private

CHART 1: DESCRIPTIVES OF PARTICIPANTS

RACE	AGE	SEXUAL ORIENTATION	MARITAL STATUS	KIDS	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	BODY DESCRIPTION
B	21	Heterosexual	S	2	5'1"	130	Petite
B	31	Heterosexual	S	2	5'7"	245	Voluptuous
B	39	Heterosexual	S	4	5'2"	150	Petite, Curvy
B	29	Heterosexual	S	0	5'8"	155	Plump, Pudgy
B	24	Heterosexual	S	0	5'4"	155	Pear, Curvy
B	36	Heterosexual	D	0	5'1"	165	Curvaceous
B	28	Heterosexual	S	0	4'11"	150	Full Curvy
B	23	Heterosexual	S	0	5'0"	170	Voluptuous
W	23	Heterosexual	M	0	5'6"	150	Normal
W	23	Heterosexual	S	0	5'5"	120	Close to Ideal
W	31	Heterosexual	D	3	5'4"	150	Pear
W	23	Heterosexual	S	0	5'9"	170	Athletic
W	23	Bisexual	S	0	5'3"	125	Petite, Stalky
W	25	Heterosexual	S	0	5'2"	175	Thick, Hippy
W	25	Bisexual	D	1	5'3"	180	Pear
W	36	Heterosexual	S	0	5'4"	120	Petite
Race: B=Black, W=White Marital Status: M=Married, S=Single, D=Divorced, W=Widow							

office for interviews. Given that IUPUI has a large number of nontraditional students, recruiting there increased the chance of recruiting adult women between the ages of 18-39. I used purposive sampling techniques to ensure that I recruited women who could easily talk about the study topic. I advertised in the IUPUI University College Advising Center, Black sororities, Sociology courses, Women Studies courses and the student areas of Cavanaugh Hall. The benefit of advertising, for example, in the IUPUI University College Advising Center was that individuals who attended summer orientation or needed to see an advisor for registration were exposed to my flyers posted throughout the building and offices. I also used snowball sampling and recruited participants through female acquaintances. I asked my acquaintances to pass my flyer to other women on campus, which aided the recruiting process. The flyer introduced the researcher, the goal of the research study, and the eligibility criteria. My email address was on the flyers in order for interested viewers to easily contact me.

Research Instruments

I conducted private one-on-one interviews (1-3 hours in length) with the women. The interviews began by my explaining the topic and purpose of the research to the participant. Each participant was asked permission for the interview to be tape recorded. Confidentiality procedures were explained both verbally and in the written consent form. After obtaining informed written consent, and providing them with a \$15.00 Target gift card for their time, I began the interviews (see appendix for the consent form).

I used an interview guide to elicit rich data. First, I asked several background questions including age, race/ethnicity, marital status, sexual orientation, and number of children. After the background questions were answered, I began asking questions about

how the participants would describe their body image. I asked participants questions about their experience from childhood to the present with their body image. I followed by asking the participants to describe the outside influences that affected their body image. These questions focused on obtaining specific information about the participant's exercise and diet history, what they perceived as beautiful and ideal body types for women of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, as well as who or what they perceived to have influenced their body image. My last set of questions aimed to discover how the meaning that White and Black women attribute to body image affects their sense of self and mental and physical well-being (see appendix for the complete interview guide). I scheduled private interviews based on my and on each woman's availability and completed them on the IUPUI campus.

Data Analysis

A grounded theory analysis of the interview transcripts allowed for identifying themes and provided insights on the participants' body image. Grounded theory focuses on the meaning embedded in the data and does not use pre-determined assumptions from the literature (Charmaz 2005; Glaser and Strauss 1967). The researcher uses transcribing, line-by-line coding, and memo writing while analyzing the data in order to avoid imposing personal experiences or preconceived categories on the data (Charmaz 2005; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

In order to maintain grounding in the data for the one-on-one interviews I tape recorded the interviews and had each interview transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. This insured that I accurately recorded the women's narratives. Each transcription took approximately six to eight hours to complete due to the average

interview lasting between 2 – 3 hours. I then analyzed the data for common themes among the participants as well as differences in experiences that may vary by the participant's race. To begin, I completed line-by-line coding of four differing transcripts consisting of two Black and two White participants. The process of line-by-line coding included identifying the main topic in each sentence of the participant's statement and coding it through using two or three words of active terminology (Charmaz 2005; Glaser and Strauss 1967). After coding the four interviews line by line, I then raised certain codes that were particularly salient and reoccurring to major themes of the interview. I wrote memos for each major theme. The memos defined the theme in detail and incorporated quotes from the transcripts to support the theme. Each subsequent interview was conducted in the same series of events; transcribing, coding, identifying major themes, and writing memos with the support of the participant's words.

An example of this process can be found in my pilot study where one of the major reoccurring themes was the "external influences of family". Each of the women in the pilot study listed more than one family member as affecting her ideas regarding her weight from an early age to the present day, with her mother being the most influential. The major code of "external influences by family member" was raised to a theme and then a memo was written using each participant's own words for a definition. After my analysis was completed for each interview, I looked closer for commonalities that linked them together and distinctions that made each separate. The in-depth literature review helped me to better understand how the findings fit in with previous research studies. All overarching themes that arose were revealed during the analyses.

Validity Concerns

Validity issues are of major concern in qualitative research. The most important are such issues of whether the participants are truthful and whether the researcher's interpretation is representative of the participants' ideas, rather than the researcher's. In order to help achieve validity and improve the quality of the data, I stressed the use of confidentiality. This helped the participants feel more comfortable and be more willing to share their stories during the interview. A second method of ensuring validity was conducting the interviews myself and having the transcription completed by a professional. I also pre-tested the interview guide during the pilot study and participants gave very rich answers. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that helped elicit rich data. Lastly, I interpreted my findings and had my thesis chair evaluate my analysis.

Potential Difficulties and Limitations

The main limitation of this study is its small sample size. Time constraints limited my sample to 16 participants. I initially had forty-nine women ask to participate, but many had to be turned away due to lack of funding and time. Of the initial 30 women who I recruited to the sample, I was only able to interview 23. Because of schedule conflicts, seven of the women were not interviewed. Only 16 women were in the final sample. This small sample size makes generalizations difficult; however, more important than generalization in qualitative research is internal validity. The findings are limited to the sample included in the study. My goal was to develop a sample from which theoretical insights could be learned and a conceptual understanding of body image could be developed as it may apply to Black and White women.

Human Subjects Concern

There were minimal risks to being involved in this study. By participating, the women may have felt emotional or mental discomfort in revealing personal experiences or opinions of their own body image or that of women from another race. Safety measures were taken to protect each participant's identity and privacy through all aspects of the research study. The only persons to hear the tape recorded interviews were I and the professional transcriber. Each of the tape recorded interviews was transcribed in private to protect confidentiality. We also de-identified the data during the transcription process and did not use the participant's name in reports. The audiotapes and all other material were kept in a private location and the audiotapes were erased at the end of the transcription process. Approval by IUPUI's institutional review board was given and all human subject protection guidelines were followed throughout the course of this study. The benefits of participating in this research study may have been sharing experiences and opinions with an individual who was interested in what the women have to say. Also, the information provided may help with any future research in this area of study.

Report Writing

I followed several rules when writing the report. All names and specific descriptors were changed during the transcription process and omitted from the written report to protect the participants' identity. Moreover, Weiss (1994) recommends omitting conversational spacers such as "ums" and "you knows" from quoted passages. Ellipses are also used when more than 3 successive words are deleted from the quotes. Three descriptors-age, race, and sexual orientation-are included for the women at the end of each quote in parentheses or within the paragraph.

FINDINGS – BODY IMAGE PERSPECTIVES OF BLACK & WHITE FEMALES

The purpose of this study was to discover and understand how Black and White women define their own and other women's body image, what factors influenced such definitions, and how their perspectives influenced their physical and mental well-being. In-depth interviews were conducted at an urban university to explore the body images of Black and White females. Several interesting themes emerged in response to the first research question about definitions of body image and how they varied by race, including, a) shared perceptions of beautiful body images, and b) shared perceptions of ideal body images.

In response to the second question about factors which influence definitions of body image, three major themes emerged, that of the influence of men, fashion, and family. Familial influences stemmed from two key family relationships, a) the mother-daughter relationship and b) the sister-sister relationship.

Finally, little was learned about how the women's definitions of body image influenced their physical and mental well-being. Instead, an unexpected theme emerged that centered on a possible link between previously experiencing some manner of physical or sexual abuse and currently sustaining a poor body image along with the associated negative health outcomes. The issue of past abuse was not on the interview schedule. Nevertheless, six of the participants voluntarily told me of having experienced abuse, and 100% of these six women reported present body image disorders. In contrast, of the remaining ten women only 20% reported a current body image disorder. These ten women, however, were not asked about abuse. Therefore it is theoretically possible that the women who did report body image problems may also have been abused. Although

the data does not clearly support a relationship between a history of past abuse and subsequent body image problems, the finding of a possible connection is so important that this study reports these findings on abuse.

The findings are organized into three main sections: 1) racial perspectives of the beautiful and ideal, 2) male, fashion, and familial influences on body image, and 2) negative body image and abuse survivors.

I. Racial Perspectives of the Beautiful and Ideal

Both Black and White women used similar descriptors and characteristics to define a beautiful woman. Inward spirit and outward appearances are the two major characteristics that the women used to describe a beautiful woman. Similarly, relatively few differences emerged between White and Black descriptions of the ideal women. Two major themes were used to characterize an ideal woman, including societal stereotypical standards and notable women in their daily lives. Whereas definitions of beauty centered on how women actually are in their everyday lives, definitions of ideal were rooted in what society expects of women. The following section describes these findings in more detail.

Black and White Females Define Beautiful

All of the women were asked the following question: “Can you describe a beautiful woman?” All participants agreed that beautiful women should be measured first by their inward spirit and last by their physical features. Physical appearances referred to height, weight, body shape, hair, and skin. Inward spirit included intelligence, articulation, a glowing personality, kindness and caring, and the strength to stand-up for her beliefs. The majority of Black and White females expressed the idea that a woman’s

beauty comes from her inward beauty and, especially, from intelligence. A Black woman in her early twenties explained: “My mother raised me to be articulate. A beautiful woman is strong, intelligent, and she knows how to express her opinions. She doesn’t have to have a certain hair or eye color. She needs to be educated and articulate” (Heterosexual). Similarly, another woman said: “The first thing that comes to mind personally would be their intellect. And that sort of stems from, what I was taught about body image” (White, 23, Heterosexual).

Similarities between the Black and White participants also included the common perception that a beautiful woman demonstrates the ability to care for herself, her family, and others. In addition, both Black and White females similarly stated that a woman may fit the societal stereotypes of what is beautiful, but may also have a “toxic personality” or unattractive inward beauty. One woman stated:

I wouldn’t describe a beautiful woman necessarily by her outward appearance, because I’ve met some very beautiful women that were pretty nasty and mean. It really deters from their appearance. A beautiful woman is someone who glows, who radiates happiness, and who is just very confident in who she is (Black, 31, Heterosexual).

In a similar fashion, a twenty-one year old White participant remarked,

I think a beautiful woman has to have her own character. I do tend to think a lot of times thinner women are more beautiful, but I do notice that some bigger women are beautiful as well. And, it just depends on their attitude, because even skinny women can be a bitch (Heterosexual).

The women also mentioned celebrities when they described a beautiful woman as a way to illustrate their main points. For example, a Black participant shared her love for reading fashion magazines as an adolescent and adult, which is why she chose a fashion model to represent her definition of beauty.

Iman, the model. [She has] a nice skin tone with nice undertones, beautiful features and a long neck and [a] beautiful long nose. She's almost like 6 foot [tall]. Now that she's older, she might be maybe 125, 130 pounds. I think she was probably maybe 110 or 115 (29, Heterosexual).

Similarly, a White participant referred to Marilyn Monroe and how society has shifted since then toward idealizing thinner female figures.

I mean now a days with the media, they portray like size zero to be beautiful, where as Marilyn Monroe was way much bigger than that back in the days. I would say she, [today's beautiful woman], would have to be around 5'4" and 5'5" and taller. No offense. As far as waist size. I mean that doesn't seem to get to me as long as they are not obese (21, Heterosexual).

The majority of Black and White participants also said that a beautiful woman could come in all races, shapes, and sizes. This is because most defined a woman of beauty in terms of her ability to demonstrate a personal inward glow of happiness, intelligence, and articulation.

A woman's life experiences, perceptions, and sexual orientation may influence the characteristics she chooses to describe beauty. I had the opportunity to interview women not only of various races (Black or White) and various ages (18-39), but also varying sexual preferences (heterosexual or bisexual). This sample of Black and White participants included two White bisexual women. Their descriptions were similar to the heterosexual women in that they also referred to a woman's inward beauty as the most important component of being beautiful. The following woman discussed the importance of physical appearance, but then stated that carrying herself with confidence is the most important aspect of what makes her beautiful.

[Beautiful women] are everywhere. I don't know what it's like to not be romantically, sexually interested in women. And, I don't know if that gives me a different view point than say a heterosexual woman or lesbian,

maybe that's different too, I don't know. I like to see a woman with curves, with movement and not just her body; it's the way she moves. Its how well her hair is done or not. It has a lot to do with how she carries herself – confidence and stuff (White, 25, Bisexual).

Black and White participants provided in-depth descriptions of beautiful women that were quite similar. Nearly all of the women discussed physical appearance as important but, overall, they felt beauty resided in a woman's inward spirit or personality characteristics. The next section explores the women's perspectives on the ideal woman and uncovers some differences between White and Black women's perceptions of ideal.

Black and White Females Define Ideal

Participants' perceptions of the ideal woman seemed to reflect societal stereotypes of race, the influence of significant family members and personal preference. Like in the earlier comparisons, there were no differences by race on questions about the ideal woman. As a group, the participants tended to diverge along three major ways in which they defined the ideal. Some participants described stereotypes that their race and others are confronted with as a result of mainstream society. Others spoke fondly of influential women in their personal lives that are ideal, because they have both inward and outward traits that are considered highly respectable to the participant. Lastly, a few women provided their own personal preferences as a way to illustrate what is ideal. Each of these definitions of ideal are further described below.

Although the women described different definitions of ideal, these differences did not vary by the women's race. Both Black and White females similarly believed that the ideal White female and the ideal Black female would vary by body type.

36-24-36. That's what everyone says. As far as I'm concerned, I weigh about, maybe 130 pounds and I'm 5'1." I think that I'm too skinny though. Other people would probably say no you're fine but, um, I think,

as a Black they try to purvey that you're supposed to have the Beyonce booty and the hips and that type of thing. So, maybe that, but I don't know, as long as you feel that you're pretty and you find yourself attractive, other people will [too] (Black, 21, Heterosexual).

The ideal for a White woman would be like 5'8" and still curvy but as you get taller you sort of stretch out a little bit more. Where as Asian women I think would be more skinny and more flat body than me, more flat chested and less curvature to them. If it was a Black [woman], I think the ideal would be a little bit more curvy, even a little bit more than a White person. [Hispanic women] I think that they're just slightly a little more curvy than White women, but I think they are pretty much in between; it's like Black women and White women (White, 23, heterosexual).

In contrast to advancing interpretations that are consistent with long standing social stereotypical images of ideal, some other participants remarked that it is easy to describe the ideal woman because the women they knew in their personal lives fit the bill. These women were mothers, friends, and/or romantic partners. The descriptions of these women provided by the respondents were given with much passion, respect, love, and in-depth detail as illustrated by the following two descriptions:

I could say my mom for instance....I couldn't have chosen a better mother. A strong woman who you can just see that she works, and she's going to school or not, or taking care of her family or [is a member] at the church. Not so much as physical but just how they, I don't know if it's an aura or it's just the way that they come into a room and they can make everyone happy. They are easy to talk to (Black, 31, Heterosexual).

Every woman I've ever been in love with has had red hair. My women tend to be short, but I am too, and we just match. She's 5' tall. And she has eyes that are [an] amazing blue. It's so cute because she got this little pixie face, and she's mouthy. It's funny because you ask me to describe my ideal woman, and I'm too busy talking about how wonderful she is to talk about what she looks like. That's part of what makes her so ideal. She is so sweet and so innocent looking. But she's got short bob red hair and she's got big blue eyes and she has an amazing mouth. I, I can't even describe it. She just has the most beautiful smile and her teeth, she's never had braces, her teeth are white and straight and perfect and beautiful. She's got really, really pretty skin. She almost never wears make up. She has really, really delicate skin, wrists and ankles and very, very small feet

and hands and then very, very pronounced hour glass figure. She's maybe a size 11/12, but she's very curvy (White, 25, Bisexual).

Black and White participants held that having long hair, having curves with a small waist, and having a big butt and average breasts were ideal traits. Interestingly, only one participant stressed the importance of the ideal woman not having any stretch marks, cellulite, or large thighs. The twenty-one year old White female quoted below believed in growing your hair out, trying to rid your body of cellulite, and exercising to reduce fat on the thighs in order to become more of the socially acceptable ideal woman. The Black female, whose remarks precede that of the quoted White female below, categorized herself as a larger woman since she was a size fifteen. Her perception of the ideal woman, despite race, should be on average a 9/10 in pants.

Well, I personally like curvy women, and I think they're beautiful. Small waist line, you know but not the mainstream, small waist line, big butt, more like Selma Hayek but she's not Black. Not exactly small, but yeah just curvaceous and maybe that's because I'm on the large size so I tend to look, look at that type as being you know ideal (Black, 29, Heterosexual).

She doesn't necessarily have to be thin, but I like longer hair. I'm trying to grow my hair out. Longer hair is more attractive to guys...If their chin isn't like connected to their neck, you know double chin and if their breasts aren't overly large...So, I guess between a B to D range. If they have to wear a XXL in their size pants, they need to start exercising. And um, a tan skin, I think most women look good, but that's probably coming from the media (White, 21, Heterosexual).

In sum, when defining ideal, the women either referred to societal stereotypes, influential female family members whom they admired, or personal preferences. A few of the participants recognized that their illustration of the ideal body did not match the stereotypes presented in the mass media or general society. Others, however, used such stereotypes as their definitions of the ideal woman. The next section examines societal factors that influenced how the women felt about their own body image.

II. Males, Fashion, and Familial Influences on Body Image

In this section, I describe how the women also found a common ground in their perceptions of the importance of men, fashion, and female family members, and how such factors influenced their experiences with body image. Whatever their race, the women felt equally the same regarding the influence of men on their perceptions and the difficulty women face while shopping for clothing in a modern society where thinness is valued. Major familial influences include the mother-daughter and sister-sister relationships. This section describes each of these themes in more detail.

Male Influences on Body Image

When discussing their perspectives on beauty and ideal body images, the participants often referred to men as having an easier time with regards to their weight and shape than women do. They also made reference to how men influenced the women's own body images. In addition, most of the women perceived Black men as having a more positive attitude toward their bodies as they were perceived to be more accepting of different types of female bodies than were White men. I elaborate on these points below.

Both the Black and the White women believed that a woman's beauty was more likely to be judged by her physical attributes than was true for men. They believed men were measured by other standards, such as whether they have a job or for their personality traits. A Black female remarked: "I've seen guys want to get calf implants, and stuff-enhance their bodies but as far as weight? You know these guys that are running around with their shirts off with their guts hanging out, and they want their women to be this perfect Coke bottle shape" (31, Heterosexual). This participant went on

to illustrate her point by describing her uncle's comments regarding her aunt's weight. "My uncle is not a skinny person either. He has a gut. I'm thinking, you know you've got a lot of nerve telling her about her gut. What about your gut? [My aunt] doesn't say anything but I can see it in her eyes sometimes when he says things, it makes her kind of sad." In sum, the majority of participants believed that women are judged more frequently and more harshly on their physical appearances. They stated that only very obese men suffered similar pressures for thinness as women. This point is explained in the following comment:

I think that guys can carry an extra 20-30 pounds, sometimes even up to 50, its ok. But I think once you get into an obese guy, I don't think that they necessarily have it any easier than us. I have guy friends who are overweight, who are bigger guys, who struggle very much dating, and feel bad about their body image, and feel bad about themselves. I think society makes it harder for women in general (White, 31, Heterosexual).

Nearly all of the women also described experiences in their own lives when a man had remarked on a feature of their own body or another woman's body in a positive or negative manner. Black and White participants perceived Black men to have the most respect and appreciation for a woman's shape and size. They criticized White males for mainly being interested in big breast and small waists. Two women's statements provide examples:

I [have] dated Black men, White men, and Hispanic men. I've been out with mixed guys. The Black and mixed men definitely make me feel more beautiful. They are definitely more attracted to my body shape than White men were...Black men look at a woman's body that's curvy or has a little bit of meat on her bones and they're like, 'You're fine,' or 'You're HOT!' You know, and they love it. White men look at it and they're like, 'Man she's gaining weight. She's just going to keep getting bigger (White, 31, Heterosexual).

[I have dated] Black, Hispanic, and White guys. Black guys [would say] you need to gain weight that I should gain, and get bigger butts and this and that. Actually in most Black communities, I'm considered small. I go out to the predominately Black clubs [and heard] 'you need to gain some weight, you know, you got a flat ass.'...I never did what they had wanted me to do. I guess if they had more tact and said it differently, because it was more like, 'Damn your ass is flat.' And then on the other side, dating White guys, it was they don't say anything. I haven't had one tell me I'm fat or anything but it's like when you see a skinny girl [walk by] it's like... 'Ah, hah! (Black, 29, Heterosexual).

These findings suggest that the influence of men in women's lives is relevant in understanding women's body image. Complimentary statements and actions by another can boost one's self esteem and positively shape one's perceptions. The incidences and degree of negativity in male comments may play a role in women developing poor body images. As a result, such negativity may contribute to women developing body image disorders.

Troubles with fashion and finding the right pants

In addition to the influence of men, the women often talked about the influence of fashion on their body image, especially when it came to shopping for pants. There was no variation among the Black and White female participants in their experiences of shopping for pants. For the most part, buying or trying on pants had a very negative impact on their body images.

All of the participants discussed problems shopping for clothing, especially pants, despite the size range from a 2 to a size 18. For example, one woman said: "Pants are always hard in my experience. Just about everyone has a horrible time [shopping for] pants" (White, 23, Bisexual). Another woman said:

I hate it. I can't stand it, because it's like I always have a big gap in the back of my pants, because you know it never fits my waist...I probably have 47ish inch hips and probably a 31 inch waist, so mine is real dramatic. It's such a pain [shopping]. I hate it. I hate it. I hate it (Black, 23, Heterosexual).

A Black woman described similar problems shopping for pants in more detail and made references to problems shopping in different stores because of her race:

Old Navy clothes are not made to fit Black people. They're just not...Black women appreciate brands like Applebottom or Babyfat because they make those jeans fit and it's gonna accentuate your butt. So, it makes it look better...I remember going into Express, and my friend was trying to get me to try on [jeans]. And he was like, 'Uh sweetie, you need a 1 or a 0.' I'm like no. If I walk over to Man Alive, I'm gonna get a 5 in Applebottoms. So, I think they are trying to get people to think that maybe they're not as big as they think they are? I don't want to think that I wear a size 1. So, I don't want to shop in that store. It does the exact opposite effect for me (21, Heterosexual).

This finding, however, may not be solely due to the participant's race. Some of the White women in this study also had problems shopping and preferred brands like Applebottom. The following comment illustrates this:

There's not a lot of jeans that are made to fit women with bigger thighs and a smaller waist. Well, unless you go to Applebottoms. They fit pretty well. Levi's look great but are skin tight. I mean they're tight through the thighs and through the butt and stuff but if I went another size bigger, they they would be completely...you could stick your whole hand down the back of my pants and you've got to wear your belt so tight (White, 31, Heterosexual).

As these quotes demonstrate, Black and White women felt equally troubled by the problems of finding pants and, more specifically, pants which celebrated the true, shapely figure of a woman. In fact, shopping often caused them much distress. The experience of shopping also often left them depressed. The following woman explained:

I was going into a size 15 when I started dieting. I'm working on a 12, yeah; I can wear 12 stretch now. When I was a 9 to a 10, I believe I was around 140 [pounds]...When I started losing weight, I went to try on all these clothes. I guess I had this vision that I lost more weight than I really lost. Nothing fit. I was just pissed, you know. If I put on a 12 and can't fit it. It's too tight. I get mad. It pisses me off. I usually get depressed when I go shopping. I don't go shopping that much. It's almost psychological. I hate it. I hate it because nothing fits right." (Black, 29, Heterosexual)

Two other participants shared distressing shopping experiences when they had the opportunity to live among the Asian cultures of South Korea and China. Each reported shopping in these countries and recounted experiences where the shopkeepers called them fat. For example, the woman who lived a year in China said,

I spent some time in China...and there were several times where I would go into stores, like to shops to look at clothes and they would just come right out and tell me, 'Um, we don't have clothes that are going to fit you. You're too fat.' I wear a 5 or a 7 depending upon the pants and the standard is more like 1, 2, and 3 for Chinese women (White, 23, Bisexual).

Although this participant did not report the experience as having a negative impact on her body image, the participant who lived in South Korea for several years recalled experiencing a lower self-esteem when shopping for clothing, often being told nothing would fit her, in Korea.

These are only a few of the many bad experiences offered by the participants in regard to finding pants. It is notable that all participants, despite their race, had trouble shopping for clothing that appropriately fit their bodies. The effect on these women's body image is best described as causing lowered self-esteem, causing feelings of depression, and stimulating much anger. Participants agreed that the fashion industry pursues thinness and that this made it difficult for them to find clothing that fit them. In summary, Black and White participants believed that men and fashion had mostly a

negative effect on their body images. They also felt that men were too likely to judge women by their physical appearance than was proper. They also uniformly felt that shopping for pants caused them distress. These findings also suggest that women may experience these effects even when they live in other countries, such as China or Korea.

Familial Impacts on Female Body Image

The women's immediate families also affected their body image, especially when family members found the women's weight and body shape to be inadequate. The two most influential family members, in this regard, were the respondents' mothers and sisters. The next section explores the critical nature of these relationships in more detail.

Mother-Daughter Relationship. The women's relationship with their mothers had both a positive and negative effect on their body images. Nearly all of the Black and White participants who had a positive body image accredited their perspective to strong, positive mother-daughter relationships. Key characteristics of these relationships were the mothers' reaffirming the daughters' beauty and intelligence. Also helpful were mothers demonstrating their own self-confidence, beauty, and hard work. For example, one Black woman said, "That's my momma. She's a hard worker and she's a strong lady. When I think of a strong black woman I think of my momma" (36, heterosexual). Another woman proudly shared her thoughts about how men viewed her mother as a beautiful person and how seeing her mother as a beautiful person resulted in her having greater self-respect toward her own body.

No matter how much society tells me that I need to be 5'1" and 110 pounds to be beautiful, I know my mother's beautiful and my mother is no where near that. My mother's 4'11" and no where near 110 pounds and I've never seen a man not turn and take a look at her butt, and that's why I think your mother is definitely gonna shape what you think is pretty (Black, 21, Heterosexual).

Another woman fondly discussed how she and her mother often had fun with body image experiences such as dieting.

My mother [influenced my body image]. We have this thing where we always tell each other about [the latest] diet. We used to do this when I was younger and it's just funny how we'll still do it now. So, we communicate on that but it's all in fun though. We really don't take it seriously, if it works it works, and if it doesn't it doesn't. It's not like something that's going to make or break us (Black, 28, Heterosexual).

The African immigrant woman in the sample said that during the short time she has lived in the U.S., she felt a pressure for thinness that did not exist in her country. This pressure led her to diet and exercise. She did not feel poorly about her body, however. Rather she dieted and exercised in order to fit in with U.S. society and to be healthier. She credited her parents strength and acceptance of her body for her having a healthy body image despite pressures to maintain thinness.

So, regardless of what people would say, I've always had my parent's approval and even my siblings. I just never felt that they loved me any differently because of what I looked like. My family was just really supportive, and they were there for me that it just did not affect me that much, as far as what I looked like, until like the end of high school (Black, 24, Heterosexual).

Overall, mothers often had a positive impact on their daughter's body image, "with my mom anything that I wore it was always, oh, that's great! Oh, you're so pretty" (Black, 29, Heterosexual). Another participant who was heavier as a child positively viewed her own mother's weight loss as a child as having an inspiring effect on her to lose weight and made her feel better about herself: "and then she [my mother] hit 8th grade and she decided that she didn't want this anymore and she went on the diet of all diets and lost it all. She was her own success story for me so that I could, you know, get skinnier" (White, 23, Bisexual).

Mothers, and sometimes grandmothers, however, could also have a negative impact regardless of whether the woman was White or Black. One participant felt that her being raised in a step family negatively impacted her body image as her step mom never explained anything to her about changes that would take place with her body as she aged.

I see myself differently than other people do, and that has a lot to do with my step-parent and step-family and my body image of myself...I was the only one that anyone ever said anything to about my body. It was just me that had the body image problems. I didn't have my birth mother there; I had a mom that didn't explain anything to me. [She] never talked about the birds and the bees and that bodies are different and you're going to start your period. She's like, 'There's the bathroom. There's instructions in the box (White, 31, Heterosexual).

This next participant expanded upon a memory that involved a vacation she took with her grandmother that negatively impacted her body image.

[My grandmother] would come up and pat my belly. No matter how many crunches I do, it's just going to be there always... I was probably 14 when the restaurant incident [happened]." There was this trip that I went on with them and we were having dinner with some of their friends and I love French Bread, loved it as a kid. And that was the complimentary bread and I was just eating so much of it. And so they started teasing me about it, their friends and my grandparents. It just really bummed me. It really got to me. I just hated them all (White, 23, Bisexual).

As the above experiences demonstrate, a woman's relationship with her mother or grandmother could have both positive and negative impacts on her body image.

Participants with a strong positive mother-daughter relationship more often reported positive influences; those reporting negative mother-daughter relationships reported negative body images. In contrast, sisters seemed to have a mostly negative impact.

The Sister-Sister Relationship. The sister-sister relationship also emerged as having an effect on the participants' body image. Nearly all respondents had at least one

sister or step-sister, and they related childhood stories involving their sisters that impacted their body image. Most of these memories were negative and may have had a detrimental effect on the participants' well-being, as the women linked such experiences to increased depression, lowered self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and desires for thinness. Sisters impacted the participants' body image and well-being in three ways: a) making comparisons to sisters who seemed to fit the ideal image of a beautiful woman, b) sisters called each other names that reflected stigmatized bodies, and c) using sisters as a behavioral referent for strategies to pursue or avoid in attempts to improve their own body shapes or sizes.

The first finding that dealt with the sister-sister relationship is best described as the sister-sister comparison. Comparisons between sisters were made by others family members or were made by the participants. The majority of respondents that were compared to their sister(s) or step-sister(s) by other family members shared childhood memories about such comparisons which negatively impacted their self-esteem and body image. For example, one woman remarked:

My step-mother had a daughter who was very thin and taller than me and five years older. I was constantly held at a comparison to her. She was skinny as a rail, no shape, just tall [and] lanky. When we would go shopping for clothes or whatever [I was told], 'Your butt's too big. Your pants don't fit you right. You're built funny... There was nobody to show me what to wear, how to match my clothes. My sister didn't care. She was like, 'I'm 5 years older than you, I ain't got time for you.' She never showed me how to curl my hair. She said, 'There's the curling iron...do it.' And I have scar...a bald spot because of it (White, 31, Heterosexual).

Other participants reflected upon the pressures of thinness they placed upon themselves due to their own comparison of the physiques of their sister(s) and that of their own bodies. "I don't feel as good when I'm around skinnier

people like my younger sister. She's beautiful. She weighs like 100 pounds and wears size 0," explained a twenty-three year old White female (heterosexual).

The feelings expressed by this participant and others demonstrate the negative health outcomes of body image that can result from making comparisons. All of the participants who shared sister-sister comparison stories reported incidences of dieting and low self-esteem at some point in their lives.

This next participant successfully lost 100 pounds and is proud of her current weight. However, she still expressed recollections about her sister that entailed negative overtones because of the inherent comparative factor in their relationship.

My sister was the ideal little girl and this is what my family has actually called her. She had the cute little tan, the little figure, and she was the little girl playing dress up. Yet, she was tough enough to where she would go out and play baseball too... We were totally different. She was really small and petite and very tan and always had a good complexion as a kid. And I was this, always burnt freckled face chunky little kid. So, it was like, 'Hmmm, I live with a Barbie doll' (White, 23, Heterosexual).

Sisters also negatively affected the women's body image by calling them derogatory names. All of the women who reported being teased regarding their weight and body shape had some level of negative body image. For example one Black woman stated:

I was called fat all through elementary [school]. I was 13 and weighed about 155 pounds. I'm 5'8' now and weigh that much... What's interesting is my family, they're small people. My sister, she is 5' and she might be 110 pounds and she's six months pregnant. My mom is 60 [years old] and she's 135 pounds now. With my mom anything that I wore it was always, 'Oh, that's great! Oh, you're so pretty.' But my sister, every time we got into an argument it would come up, 'You're just jealous of me because you're fat' (Black, 29, Heterosexual).

The effect of derogatory name-calling by her sister, along with other factors, may have resulted in this participant self-consciously struggling with her weight since her early years of elementary school. During the time of this interview, the Black female reported that her current dieting strategy consisted of one meal per day, exercising approximately 1-2 hours daily on her treadmill while wearing a partial sweat suit, and a daily regimen of Hydroxycut. Her goal is to reach a size 9/10 and try to remain at a healthy weight.

Some of the women in the sample were the “ideal” sister or physically favored and were the ones who did the derogatory name calling aimed at their sister(s). This next participant came to realize the negative effect that such name calling may have created for her older sister and genuinely regrets her actions.

I remember when my grandparents would offer [my sister] candy and then turn around and talk to mom in the kitchen about how she needed to lose weight. I remember that making her upset. I can even remember, we got into this really big fight and I just started calling her fat. I knew that would affect her, and I mean she just totally went off the wall... I understand now the words that I was saying, and I feel terrible. I feel so terrible about that now. I would never, no matter how angry I was at her, I would never pick on that [her weight] (White, 23, Heterosexual).

The final finding of the effect of the sister-sister relationship was the impact on participants of observing their sisters’ experience with body image issues and, where relevant, the sisters’ strategies to improve. The question for respondents, in these cases, was whether or not to copy or avoid their sisters’ behaviors. The potentially negative impacts of such observations were usually avoided if the participant perceived the sister’s experience as a negative one. For example, one White participant shared the following experience:

I [am] fairly close to normal. Where as like my sister, has always sort of been on the heavier side and she always felt like when she gained weight, it's a serious issue for her. I've seen how that's driven her nuts and I try as much as possible to not let that effect me too much. I mean I try to make a conscious effort to maybe get rid of it somehow, but I don't physically exert myself anymore than is needed (White, 23, Heterosexual).

Witnessing negative observations, such as these illustrates the decision making process of some participants who chose not to copy their sister(s) actions. In contrast, a few respondents provided positive perceptions of their sisters' actions. In these instances, the sisters were rewarded by receiving either male attention or family praise for their shapely bodies. Another woman shared her experiences:

I know growing up, I noticed, because she was my older sister, that her being thick got her a lot of attention from guys. I mean I had boyfriends too but it's just when you go out with you friends or when I would go out with my sister that they would be like, 'Hey you over there.' They would always be calling to her just cause she had a lot of butt or whatever. So, I would be like I gotta eat some cornbread or something so my butt would get bigger and I can get some attention (Black, 21, Heterosexual).

Women that witnessed negativity towards their sister's body shape or size were more likely to avoid their sister's behaviors. Sometimes they engaged in the opposite behavior which may also have led them to develop a body image disorder. For example, participants who had an older sister teased because of her weight, who then responded by struggling to lose the weight, would often become overly conscious about their own weight, and do everything possible to maintain thinness. Moreover, women who observed their sister(s) receiving positive feedback for their body size and/or shape would subsequently pursue the behavior, shape, and size of the sister.

Overall, mother-daughter relationships had a positive impact on body image were if the mothers were positive about their own bodies and reassuring of their daughters'

bodies. By contrast, participants who experienced negative relationships with their mothers and sisters reported having negative body images growing up.

III. Experiencing Negative Body Image among Abuse Survivors

A final and unexpected theme centered on a possible link between previously experiencing some manner of childhood physical or sexual abuse and currently sustaining a poor body image. Each of the six participants who reported being abused also described body image problems. By contrast, only two of the remaining ten women reported current body image disturbances. None of these women, however, were asked about abuse. Therefore it is theoretically possible that the remaining women who did not report abuse may also have been abused. This would undermine the hypothesized relationship. Although the data does not clearly support a relationship between past abuse and subsequent body image problems, the importance of a possible connection is so critical that this study reports, with emphasis, the findings on abuse and body image problems. I discuss this in more detail below.

Sexual and Physical Abuse Encounters

Both Black and White participants were among the six women who reported sexual and physical abuse. Although some of the women identified a few of the perpetrators as family members and peers; there were others that chose not to reveal the abuser's identity. Among the perpetrators mentioned by a few of the women were male family members, including fathers, brothers, uncles, and male cousins. A White, twenty-five year old female (heterosexual) reflected upon her life struggle with child molestation by her brother, father, and male cousins. The woman revealed that the molestation by male family members occurred sporadically from the age of nine until the beginning of

her college years. The most terrorizing time frame was during her elementary school years when she began bingeing as a coping mechanism to handle the chaos. She was trapped in fear, secrecy, and shame that silenced her from seeking help.

The women who were abused by family members did not go into great detail about their abuse experiences. Those abused by non-family members, however, did share more such details. For instance, another woman reported that:

By the time I was 10, I was extremely aware of my body...I was molested for the first time when I was 10, so that made me very aware of the fact that obviously there's something here that somebody wanted badly because he was willing to go to prison over it and he did go to prison... I noticed people were reacting to me differently and men specifically. I don't mean just boys my own age, I mean men who are entirely too old to be entertaining the idea of reacting to me at all. I always looked older than my age so, I guess they can't be blamed? I was very, very young and was teased because I blossomed early. So, by 5th grade I had a swell of hips and I was already a C cup. So, I'm running around, 11 or 12 years old with the figure of a 16, 17 year old girl. In the course of my lifetime, I have been raped 5 times, four times before the age of 15 (White, 25, Bisexual).

Women who went through puberty earlier than the average age of menarche received more negative, unwanted, and harmful attention from male peers and older men at very young ages. Another participant shared her story.

There was a lot of negative attention, especially when I was really little and boys that age are curious. The fact that I was very young and they were able to take advantage of that just because they were curious...The other thing is that in Korea it's not impolite to stare so you stare. So, it's okay for kids to do that and so they stared at me...But the boys, you know at the school I went to, it was disrespectful. That's how it came across to me. It was very disrespectful. It was very, they didn't see me, they're trying to cop a feel, its not that they liked me (White, 25, Heterosexual).

Several of the women reported that their perpetrator(s) were someone they knew. These male figures were familiar and trusting to the respondents until the abuse began in the early years of adolescence. The lost of trust these women experienced at young ages

may continue to affect their self-esteem and self-respect to this day, as another woman explained:

I can remember age 15 and 16 were the worst years of my life. I don't talk about this often but when I do talk about it, it's because I'm prompted to talk about it. I'm encouraged to talk about it. Um, someone invaded my space and I didn't quite know what to do or what to make of it because I trusted them. So, I told my best friend. 'It's like I don't know what to do.' And during that time I would see after school specials on TV about people being molested, about girls being molested and I would always wonder, 'How come they didn't tell?' And until I was put in that situation, I understood why they didn't tell and my thoughts were, 'Who's going to believe me?' It was a big, big deal [and] that interfered with how I interacted with men in general. This individual, I looked to them as like a father figure, and they just tarnished that whole thing (Black, 36, Heterosexual).

Negative Effects of Abuse on the Self

Experiencing abuse may have negative effects on a woman's self esteem and body image. These effects may, in turn, play a role in such women developing body image disorders.

Two of the participants who reported abuse made specific reference to their abuse experiences affecting their self-esteem. The respondents felt compelled to share how their lives were changed due to another individual's deliberate and cruel actions, and their words should not be taken lightly. This first woman reported how her abuse experience led her to always be suspicious of men and to question whether they wanted anything other than sex. She explained:

So, in different relationships that I've had prior to the age of 30, I realized I would look for some type of fathering quality in [men]. You know, protect me. Take care of me. Don't take advantage of me. Those kinds of things that I would consider to be fathering qualities. It just interfered with how I interact, interacted or even today, interact with men. You can be in the middle but sometimes it can be really, really bad and sometimes you can just have a real negative take on it...I don't know if they're serious or if they're out for one thing or if they're just trying to get next to

me?...You know how you have guards? I have several brick walls, several moats with some alligators and crocodiles in them (Black, 36, Heterosexual).

Another woman discussed how being sexually abused destroyed her self worth and negatively influenced how she viewed herself and interacted with others for years after the abuse occurred.

I think being molested does really weird things to your head. You look at yourself differently...I always felt very much out of place. I felt older. I felt misplaced. I felt like I didn't belong with other children. I had had my body, my gender, my sexuality, my weakness, all of that thrown in my face, used against me, used as weapons against me...You feel on one hand worthless and on the other hand, somebody wanted me that much? God, why? You feel broken and defiled. Especially, when you're only a kid and you only just begun to enter the physical aspects of womanhood and you're still 10 years old. You just can't handle that kind of thing, so it had a huge impact on the way that I saw myself...My self image, for many people, their self-image is wrapped up so tight in their self or they can't distinguish between the two. My self worth plummeted, because I felt like I was damaged goods. I was broken. I was used. I was the creepiest thing. And I was only 10, what was I going to do? So, it had a huge impact on the way that I saw myself internally and that had a huge impact on how I portrayed myself to the world, which had a big impact on how others saw me, which impacted how I saw myself and that became a vicious cycle that I repeated for about 10 years (White, 25, Bisexual).

As noted earlier in the thesis, body image disorders may include one or more of the following: an eating disorder, low self-esteem, distorted body images, and/or self-harm. Whereas only two of the six abused participants revealed having an eating disorder, all of them reported having a low self-esteem, experiencing excessive self-consciousness, or engaging in emotionally-driven over-eating at some point after the abuse happened, but not before. One woman explained:

In the black community side, when I say food is a big deal, I think my thing with food was a protection. That's why I eat well. It was good to me. If nobody else was going to be good to me, I knew I was going to be good to myself...And so I embrace food as a protector of some sort (Black, 36, Heterosexual).

Another woman shared her experience with abuse and how she felt it led her to have a distorted body image.

I have no real concept of what I look like to the outside world, because I only know what I see in my head and that has not changed in 5 years. I am actually diagnosed as body dimorphic and anorexic. I had two other siblings that I was raising whenever I wasn't in school due to the abuse that was in our house. My life and the things I dealt with up until age 14 and 15, got out of control, [and] combined to give me a body image that was extremely unrealistic (White, 25, Bisexual).

One of the reasons body image disorders are of major concern is that they can lead to negative health outcomes for those who develop the disorders. The woman with anorexia explained:

Anorexia is not about your body. It's not about how you look. It's about control at the end of the day...I have done damage to my liver. I am at higher risk for certain cancers. I am at higher risk for osteoporosis. I have a heart arrhythmia that will never go away. After a little while your period comes back, your hair stops falling out, but it still falls out very easily and comes back in baby fine and frizzy...The only thing that can fix an anorexic is an anorexic (White, 25, Bisexual).

Even though most of the women who experienced abuse did not go into great detail about those experiences, it is still striking that all of the women who reported abuse also reported having developed a body image disorder. The data reviewed here provide a small insight into the possible relationship between abuse experiences and body image problems. Each of the participants with a history of abuse possessed negative body images and disorders, such as an eating disorder. It is crucial for further research to expand on this topic and to explore the effects of abuse on women's body image issues.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The original goal of this study was to explore the body images of adult Black and White females under the age of forty. I specifically sought women of these groups so that comparisons on perceptions of body image could be made across females of these different racial groups. I also sought to compare the socio-cultural factors that influenced the women's body images and how their mental and physical well-being was affected. The overall findings of this study are consistent with previous body image literature. The women held views of the ideal Black and White woman which were consistent with commonly held stereotypes that Black women are heavier and White women are thinner. Several socio-cultural factors also clearly had an impact on their body images, especially men's perceptions, the fashion industry, and mother's relationships with their daughters. In addition, this study discovered new findings. The women's sister-sister relationship and their having a history of sexual or physical abuse also affected the women's body image. Below, I expand on these findings and make various recommendations for future research.

First, even though all of the women shared the same perception of beauty and ideal body images, they all had different perceptions of the ideal White and Black women. Women from both racial groups commonly identified a beautiful woman, regardless of her race, as women who possessed traits of inner qualities such as intelligence, articulation, kindness, and strength in expressing their opinions. In contrast, the women used racial stereotypes to describe the ideal White and ideal Black women's body. White women were expected to be thinner and Black women could be heavier. Given that this study only looked at Black and White women's perceptions, an initial

recommendation to future researchers would be the undertaking of a qualitative study of Latina and Asian American women's body image. These groups are underrepresented within body image literature and research on them would help provide insight into body images of women across cultures.

A second layer of analysis sought to determine the impact on the women's body images of socio-cultural influences such as interactions with males, accommodating fashions, and interactions with family members. Black and White females supplied positive and negative examples of how men influenced their body image through sharing personal experiences. In addition, all of the women perceived men of minority racial and ethnic backgrounds to be more accepting of women of different sizes than White men. Hence, a second suggestion is to conduct a qualitative research study to explore Black and White men's perceptions of female body image. This would allow for comparative research between genders and races.

A more significant effect on body image appeared to be the women's experiences while shopping for pants. All participants expressed body image related troubles when pursuing the purchase of pants. The shared perception was that pants are not made to fit women appropriately in the hips, butt, and thighs. Respondents reported feelings of depression, anger, bitterness, and low self-esteem due to the inevitability of the pants they sought to purchase not fitting comfortably, and the inconsistency in the labeling of pant sizes. It is highly recommended that further research examine the issue of shopping for clothing as a facilitator of body image stress among women, given that so many of the respondents, irrespective of race or age, reported such difficulties.

The third factor that had an impact on the women's body image, an impact greater than that of interactions with males and of accommodating fashion (pants), was the influence of particular familial interactions: the mother-daughter and sister-sister relationships. The flavor of these relationships or interactions elicited both positive and negative responses. Quantitative and qualitative studies within the literature reported mothers suffering from an eating disorder were more likely to have a daughter that later developed one. Following this, my study further investigated the mother-daughter relationship and how it impacted the daughter's body image. A strong positive mother-daughter relationship resulted in the daughter having a higher self-esteem and greater acceptance of her body. By contrast, having a strongly negative relationship with one's mother resulted in a lowering of the daughter's self-esteem and less acceptance of her body.

My findings indicated that an important additional familial influence on women's body image stemmed from sister-sister relationships. This unexpected finding seemed to work in three specific ways: a) when the respondent was compared (or self-compared) to sisters who seemed to fit the ideal image of a beautiful woman, b) when the respondent and her sister called each other names that reflected stigmatized body types (e.g., "fatty"), and c) when respondents used their sisters as a behavioral referent as strategies for improving their own body shape or size.

The study participants reported that consistent comparisons of them to a younger or older sister by parents, family and others resulted in a lowering of their self-esteem and of their acceptance of their body sizes or shapes, in most instances. The impact of name-calling by one sister to the other also negatively influenced the respondents' body images

and lowered their self-esteem, often lasting into adulthood. Sisters that used another sister as a behavioral referent developed positive and/or negative mannerisms, which affected their body image. A participant that observed her sister's constant worry regarding her weight pledged to not become as obsessed. Another respondent noted the positive attention her sister received by male counterparts and the desire to have a similar shape. Therefore, it is crucial that future research not only further explore the influence on body image disorders of the mother-daughter relationship, but more importantly that it examines the impact of sister-on-sister interactions as described here.

To conclude, the final factor that affected the women's body image was having experienced abuse. Six out of the sixteen interviewees voluntarily shared having experienced sexual, and/or physical abuse. All respondents revealing such experiences related undergoing some body image disorder, such as low self-esteem, bingeing, or anorexia. Because this information was offered voluntarily and not part of the formal interview topics, we cannot assume that women reporting no body image disorder did not also experience abuse. If these women had also experienced abuse, that would undercut the potential relationship between having experienced abuse and body image disorders. Thus, the unexpected, but potentially strong relationship is unclear. It is therefore absolutely critical that further research explore and expand upon the history of abuse and its effects on body image.

After concluding this study, additional ideas for further research developed along several lines. One idea is to study body image disorders among women at different ages in order to better understand women's body image overtime. The present study supports such an idea because it indicated that there may be a relationship between particular

childhood experiences and adult body imagery. Women teased for their body shape and size during the early years of their childhood reflected easily upon those memories and showed higher body dissatisfaction and more self-consciousness as adults.

It is strongly suggested that future research study female body images throughout the full range of childhood schooling, from the elementary grades to the end of high school. This would help us to better understand the earliest body images and how they evolve from childhood to adulthood. Since the literature primarily displays information regarding adolescents and college females, it is important to study the perceptions of women over the age of forty to get a fuller view of the range of the problems across the entire life-cycle. Future research could have two groups of women: menopausal and postmenopausal. The female body is experiencing several changes during these times; such changes could lead to a change in body image.

The final proposal in expanding body image research is to explore the significance of male-based familial influences. Participants mentioned their fathers and brothers, but not as much as they mentioned their mothers or sisters. Perhaps purposively asking questions in reference to male family members may bring insight into this area. In particular, studies examining body image issues among men should look closely at the influences of the kinds of relationships and interactions that study subjects experience with their fathers and brothers. Such influences may have effects that parallel those of mothers and sisters on women's body images. Hopefully, such further research will yield firmer recommendations that can truly address the widespread problems women (and perhaps even men) are experiencing in body imagery.

APPENDICES

The appendices contain the following materials

1. About the Interviewer
2. Research Flyer
3. Interview Guide
4. Informed Consent Form

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

There were a few participants that commented on my physical characteristics as a white female and flipped the interview questions around to me. I share these examples in order to provide further understanding of the dialogue between the researcher and participant. More importantly, my personal motivation for completing this qualitative interview study was to explore the body image of women due to my own history of struggles with negative body image. I wanted to learn if other women shared my experiences.

One thirty-six year old Black participant was curious about my physical features and remarked, “You got some hips on you, but I’m not saying that in a bad way. You got it going on girl. That was one of the things I noticed about you, I was like, ‘Wow, she’s hippy.’ It’s not bad, don’t be upset.” I assumed a researcher limitation may be my White ethnicity for Black participants because they may not feel comfortable speaking to a woman outside her race. I asked both Black and White women if being interviewed by a White interviewer affected their answers and all participants said no. A few of the Black and White participants excitedly stated they were happy that I was not the stereotypical White female. In the case of this study, my body size, shape, and weight seemed to have a positive effect on the credibility of the data when interviewing these women. It helped to put the women at ease and made it easier for them to open up to me.

My response to the participant intrigued by my physical features and the dialogue between the participant and I was as follows:

I’m not upset. No, I have to say too, personally, I do have a larger bust, larger thighs, and a larger butt than my white counterparts, which makes me feel like I don’t fit in. It’s funny that you mention that, because I recently had a woman I work with talk with me about my background, and

I explained my mom is Castilian Spanish. And she was like, 'I knew it. I knew you had some ethnicity in you! I knew you weren't all white!'" The participant stated, "And I knew that there is something black or something [in you]."

Another participant, a twenty-three year old black female, questioned me during the interview, "Well, I hate to flip the script, but how is your body image?" I felt it was a fair question to ask and gave my response as follows;

My body image, I would have to say, depends upon the day. I have good days that I'm feeling good about myself like, 'Yeah, you're looking good today.' I have days that I'm feeling like a cow. I'm very self-conscious, very self-conscious of my chest. I am very self-conscious of my butt and my hips, because they make me different than other white women and draw the attention of men. So, I wouldn't say that I have a healthy body image. I'm trying to work on it. Definitely trying to work on it. I'm aware that the media influences me. I'm aware that my abusive past influences me and the things that have been said about me and the things that have been done to me, definitely influence the way that I feel about my body. I have been physically, sexually, emotionally, and mentally abused. Due to these life experiences my trust for the male counterpart is a continuous battle. I have been beaten down in all forms by those who say they love me. Men have made bets with one another and told me any man would dream of being with you. I relied on food to cope with the pain and believed gaining weight would keep me safe. For the longest time, I've hated myself. And when you hate yourself, you just hate everything about yourself and the world. It's a really hard thing to teach yourself to learn to like who you are, to love who you are, and respect who you are. That's a really hard thing to do and I'm 24, I'm still trying to do it.

This participant continued by asking me which attributes I liked about my body.

Again, I felt it was a fair question since I had asked the interviewees the same. My response was as follows:

I really like my eyes. I really like my eyes, because they're hazel. I feel they're unique. I feel like they're really pretty, and I don't see a lot of other people walking around with the same color. I like my dimples, like my smile, always got a lot of compliments on those things. Some personality characteristics that I like is I would say, 'I've been through Hell and back and very determined and alive.' I'm really happy that I'm alive, and I'm at the part of my life where I'm developing good self-

confidence that had been stripped away through out much of my life. So, I'm just really happy that I'm alive and I'm here...I absolutely love Sociology. I love helping other people. I love listening and talking to other people. I know that I have a temper that can get me into trouble, but I'm working on it. I know it's a learned behavior from my past. I have absolutely no problem standing up for what I believe in, and that is a characteristic that I would never want to change.

Advocating social justice for the underprivileged, the poor, and the less fortunate is the passion of my heart. My life changed as a little girl witnessing the abuse and the hatred that human beings can inflict upon one another especially those that were my family. The discrimination and brutality enforced in the name of righteousness against gender, age, and race has developed my perspective of the world and made my heart bittersweet. Even to this day I have not grasped the concept of forgiving others or most importantly forgiving myself. Though, now I know there are women of wisdom who have walked this road before me that can help navigate and gently take my hand. The only certain aspect for me is that this thesis has positively changed my life.

Women of Ethnicity & Body Image

Research Study

Are you a White or Black Non-Hispanic female between ages 18 to 39?

Would you like to describe your body image experience and how your body has been “shaped” by your racial/ethnic group?

What stereotypes of body image do women of your racial/ethnic group face in society?

I want to hear from you!!!

I am a female IUPUI graduate student conducting a research study for my Sociology Masters Thesis. I am interested in studying body image among women of various racial/ethnicities and how body image affects their daily lives.

Who can participate?

- IUPUI female students between the ages of 18 and 39.
 - Women of White or Black Non-Hispanic racial/ethnicity.
 - Women who can participate in a tape-recorded interview that will last between 1 to 2 hours.
 - **Every participant’s identity will be kept CONFIDENTIAL!!**
 - Each participant will receive a \$15.00 TARGET GIFT CARD!!
-

**For more information, or to become a participant,
please email:**

Sarah at smvincen@iupui.edu

Deadline is October 1st 2006

Student Research conducted at IUPUI. IRB Approval # EX0606-31B

Qualitative Interview Protocol

Title: Body Image Perspectives of White and Black Women at an Urban University

Advisor: Carrie E. Foote-Ardah, PH.D.
Student: Sarah M. Vincent
Department of Sociology
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
CA 303, 425 University Blvd.
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202
Phone: 317.278.0621
E-mail: smvincen@iupui.edu

The Qualitative Interview Protocol contains the following materials

1. Pre-Screening Interview Protocol
2. Interview Protocol

Pre-Screening Interview Protocol

The interview process will begin when a potential interviewee contacts Sarah Vincent about the study through e-mail. Sarah Vincent will make an introduction and then conduct an email or phone screening interview to establish whether or not the interviewee meets the eligibility requirements of the study. If eligible, Sarah Vincent will then schedule an interview.

1) Introduction

Hello, thank you for emailing me. I am looking for women who meet the following eligibility requirements: White or Black female, IUPUI student, between the ages of 18 and 39 who are available to state their body image experiences. If you are interested in participating in this study I would like to hear from you. I am a female Indiana University Purdue University Sociology graduate student conducting a qualitative interview study for my Masters Thesis. I will conduct the interviews and am interested in women of ethnicity's body image experiences. You will be compensated with a \$15.00 Target gift card for your time and everything shared with me will be confidential. The findings from this study will better assist researchers in further studying women of ethnicity and their body image.

2) Prescreening Questions

First, a series of questions need to be answered in order to determine whether you are eligible to participate in the study. Please, respond to these questions through email.

Screening Interview Questions	Must answer the following for eligibility
1. Are you a female?	1. Yes
2. How old are you?	2. Must be between 18 to 39
3. What racial/ethnic background do you identify with?	3. Must be White or Black Non-Hispanic
4. What is your sexual orientation?	4. Heterosexual, Homosexual, or Bisexual

3) Schedule Interview

Once, the researcher has received the interviewee's responses, if the interviewee is eligible, then an interview will be scheduled. Sarah Vincent will email the interviewee of their eligibility and ask when she is available to be interviewed? The email will consist of informing the interviewee of the following information: a private location on-campus (my office or another reserved area) or an off-campus room will be reserved. Sarah Vincent will send a reminder email the day before the interview with the exact location of the room and the time of the interview. If the participant would like to continue then she will be asked to email Sarah Vincent her availability.

Interview Protocol

4) Introduction

I would like to thank you for coming today. Thank you for participating in this research study. Have you ever been interviewed before? The purpose of this interview study is to better understand women of ethnicity's body image. I would like to better understand their experiences and what influences their perspective. Any findings from this study will help further research in the area of women of ethnicity and their body image.

5) Interviewer/Interviewee Role

I would like for you to feel that this is your interview- I am here to listen to what you have to say. I am very interested in hearing about your perspectives and experiences, so please feel free to share anything that comes to mind. My job is to listen to you and accurately record your feelings and experiences.

6) Explain Taping Procedures

Is it okay that I tape record our discussion so that I do not have to take notes and so that I can get your complete answer?

7) Assure Interviewee of Confidentiality

Please feel free to speak openly. Any comments you make during this interview process will be confidential. Your name and any identifiable information will not be included in my report. If there are any questions you do not want to answer you may say "Pass."

8) Time Frame of Interview

The interview will last approximately 1 hour to 2 hours. If you need a break feel free to let me know. The restroom is located.....and the smoking areas are located.....

9) Obtain Informed Consent

Before we begin, I would like to go over the study's informed consent form, which describes the nature of the study, your role in the study, the measures taken to maintain your confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the study. You will need to sign the form to indicate you agree to participate.

10) Provide \$15.00 gift card

Thank you again for talking with me. This is the \$15.00 Target gift card for participating in the study.

11) Questions?

This is everything I needed to share with you. Do you have any questions about the interview? If not, then let's begin. I will now begin tape-recording. I have background questions, then main questions, and lastly closing questions

Background Questions

- a. How old are you? _____(Must be between 18-39)
- b. What year are you at IUPUI? _____(Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Graduate student)
- c. How would you describe your race/ethnicity? (Probe for White or Black Non-Hispanic) _____
- d. What is your marital status? (Probe for widow, divorce, or separated) _____
- e. Do you have any children? (Probe for how many and their ages). _____
- e. What is your sexual orientation? _____(Probe for Heterosexual, etc.)

12) Main Questions

Thank you. Let's begin. My main goal is to understand your perspective on body image and what influences do you feel impact that perspective. In addition, I would like to know your experiences and perspective of women of another ethnicity.

AIM ONE: The following questions will meet aim one, which is to describe the meaning of personal body image from the perspective of White or Black Non-Hispanic women.

- a. Can you describe a beautiful woman?
Prompt: How tall? Weight? Facial features? Body Shape? Hair and Eye color? Any other physical or personal characteristics?
- b. Can you describe the ideal body type for a woman?
Prompt: What characteristics make her beautiful? Ideal? What about women of different races?
- c. How do you feel you compare to the description of a beautiful woman and the ideal body type?
Prompt: What makes you similar? Different?
- d. Can you describe your experiences with body image from your childhood to the present?
Prompt: How old were you? What were you feeling? When did it begin?

Possible follow-up questions include:

- i. Can you tell me what emphasis food has in your family for: dinner, snack, holidays, and family events?
- e. Can you describe your own body image perspective of yourself?
Prompt: Overweight? Curvy? Thick? Slender? Petite?

Possible follow-up questions include:

- i. Can you describe how this makes you feel?
Prompt: Emotionally? Physically? Mentally?

- ii. Can you tell me how healthy you think your body image is for yourself?
Prompt: Comfortable or Uncomfortable with your body?

AIM TWO: The following questions will meet aim two, which is to discover what socio-cultural factors impact their own body image as well as their perspective of other women's body images.

- f.. Can you identify what or who influences your body image for yourself?
Prompt: The Media? Family? Your Racial/Ethnic Group? Other Racial/Ethnicities?
- g. What influence do men have on your body image and how?
Prompt: Healthy or Unhealthy? Positive or Negative?

Possible follow-up questions include:

- i. Can you tell me who or what influences your body image the most and what makes them/that most influential?
Prompt: The media? Family? Your Racial/Ethnic Group? Other Race/Ethnicities?
- ii. Can you tell me if you exercise and how often? What is your workout routine?
Prompt: How do you feel when you exercise? What are you thinking about during your workout? What are the reasons you exercise?
- iii. Can you tell me if you have ever dieted and what was that like? What caused you to diet?
Prompt: What were the results of the diet and by what means? Age?
- h. How would you describe the physical features of women from a different racial/ethnic group?
Prompt: White? African? Latina? Asian?

Possible follow-up questions include:

- i. Can you describe stereotypes within your own racial/ethnic group?
Prompt: How should a woman look? Compare and Contrast?
- ii. Can you describe for me how women might be influenced by their own body image?
Prompt: Is it for a mate? Health? Self-satisfaction?
- i. Can you describe for me any personal concerns you might have on your own body image?
Prompt: Women of your racial/ethnic group? Women in general?

Possible follow-up questions include

- i. Can you give any suggestions on how to positively influence the body image of women?

Prompt: Through: Family? Media? Advertisement?

AIM THREE: The following questions will meet aim three, which is to learn how the meaning White and Black Non-Hispanic women attribute to body image affects their sense of self such as emotionally, mentally, and physically.

- j. What is the value you place on your body image?

Prompt: The body image value placed on your ethnicity?

- k. How do you feel compared to other women among your ethnicity?

Prompt: Fit-in? Out-of-Place?

- l. How have the experiences from your childhood to the present affected your daily life?

Prompt: Physically? Emotionally? Mentally? Relationships? Health?

Possible follow-up questions include:

- i. Can you tell me how other family members have been affected?

Prompt: Physically? Emotionally? Mentally?

13) Closing Questions

We are almost finished with the interview. Before I ask the final questions, is there anything you would like to add? Thank you. Let's proceed.

- a. What do you feel are your positive attributions of your body, your family, and your racial/ethnic group? How does it make you feel?
- b. How much of an influence does your own body image have in your life?
- c. Based upon your current physical appearance, shape, and inner personal traits; if we were to change only your skin color to (Black/White), can you describe how you think you would fit into that race?
- d. Can you describe for me how influencing it was being interviewed by a female, White researcher?
- e. Are there any questions or comments you would like to add?

Thank you again for participating in this interview research study on women of ethnicity's body image. The information provided will be very helpful. You may contact me if you have any questions or comments about this experience. Thank you for coming, this concludes our interview.

IUPUI and Clarion Informed Consent Statement For

Project Title: Body Image Perspectives of White and Black Women at an Urban University
(Qualitative Interview Study)

Study Purpose

You are invited to participate in the Body Image Perspectives of White and Black Women at an Urban University Qualitative Interview Study. The research project is being completed as my Sociology Masters Thesis. The purpose of this study is to become more knowledgeable about women's body image within their own ethnicity and their perception of body image among women of a different ethnicity. I would like to speak with you in private about your experiences and perceptions of your own body image and that among women of your race and those from another ethnicity.

Number of People Participating

If you agree to participate in this one-on-one interview then you will be one of thirty women who are interviewed.

Procedure of the Study

Participants will be interviewed in private by IUPUI Sociology graduate student Sarah Vincent. She would like to speak with you and tape record your conversation about your experiences and perceptions of women's body image among your ethnicity and those of another race. The interview will be an hour to two hours in length and will be done between the months of June 2006 and October 2006. Sarah Vincent will ask you to state the ethnicity you represent, your age, your personal definition of your own body image, the experiences you have with your weight within your race, and your perception of a woman's body image from a different race. These interviews are confidential and your identity will not be revealed during any part of the research process **except** if Sarah Vincent is informed of specific illegal activities that she is required to report by law (view risk section below).

Study Risks

There are minimal risks being involved in this study. By participating, you may feel emotional or mental discomfort in revealing personal experiences or opinions of your own body image or that of women from another race. An additional risk, is the Indiana State Law requires Sarah Vincent to break confidentiality when she learns of specific information such as any of the following: learning of child sexual or physical abuse, learning of harm you plan to do towards yourself or another human being, or the possibility of having this information subpoenaed by legal authorities if illegal activities are spoken about during this interview study.

Payment for Taking Part in the Study

There is no cost for being in this study. There is a \$15.00 Target gift card compensation for volunteering to participate.

Benefits

You may feel satisfaction when contributing to this research study due to sharing your experiences and opinions with an individual who is interested in what you have to say. The information you provide may help with any future research in this area of study.

Alternative to Taking Part in the Study

Each participant may choose voluntarily whether she would like to participate or not participate without any coercion or consequences. The participant may end the interview at any time or pass on any question they do not wish to answer.

Confidentiality

Besides what was mentioned previously, safety measures will be taken to protect each participant’s identity and privacy through all aspects of the research study. The only person to hear the tape recorded interviews will be Sarah Vincent and potentially her instructor Professor Carrie E. Foote-Ardah. Sarah Vincent will transcribe each of the tape recorded interviews in private to protect confidentiality. Your name will not be used in any of the reports from this study and specific descriptions may be changed to ensure anonymity in all reports. The audiotapes once transcribed will be destroyed and all other material will be kept in a filing cabinet in a locked room.

Contact Information

If you have any questions for Sarah Vincent then please email her at smvincen@iupui.edu or call 317-278-8454. You may also contact her faculty advisor, Professor Foote-Ardah at foote@iupui.edu or call 317-278-8454. Also, for questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the IUPUI/Clarian Research Compliance Administration office at 317-278-3458 or 800-696-2949.

Informed Consent Statement

I voluntarily choose to participate in the Body Image Perspectives of White and Black Women at an Urban University. I understand the above information that was provided to me before the study began, and I understand that I may end this interview at any time and not answer any question(s) that I wish not to. I agree to be tape recorded as part of this interview study requirement and I, the participant, meet the eligibility requirements of this study.

Printed Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant_____

Date_____

Person Obtaining Consent_____

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Sarah M Vincent

EDUCATION

Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology

Concentration: Family and Gender

University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, IN

Bachelor of Science

Double Major: Sociology and Psychology

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

June 2005-
May 2007

Graduate Assistant for Twenty-first Century Scholars,

University College of IUPUI, Indianapolis, IN

*Directed IUPUI Scholars Program during academic year of 2005

*Mentor Coordinator (05-07) for the Scholars Mentor/Mentee Program

*Responsible for communication between Scholar's office and scholars

*Presented IUPUI Scholars Success at Statewide and

Local Conferences *Tracked all IUPUI scholars through creation of contact forms

*Created/Monitored scholar program assessment& evaluation

*Assisted with Financial Aid and Scholarship Eligibility questions

*Programmed/Advertised academic workshops and social events

*STAR Program to better serve Twenty-first Century Scholars

Aug. 2003-
Apr. 2005

Personal Assistant, Southern Indiana Resource Solutions, Boonville, IN

*Responsible for planning community activities with client

*Assisted independently living mentally handicap client

*Implemented and monitored goal achievement and behavioral plan

*Tracked medication

Jan. 2004-
Dec. 2004

GearUp Mentor, University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, IN

*Mentored Freshman and Sophomore 21st Century Scholars

*Designed and facilitated social activities for mentees

*Implemented tutoring and class scheduling sessions

*Participant in GearUp Mentor team meetings and workshops

Fall 2004

Teacher's Assistant, University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, IN

*Co-taught a Freshman Seminar course

*Assisted grading assignments, notebooks, and projects

*Independently met with students to track their progression

Feb. 2003- **Research Assistant**, University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, IN
Aug. 2003
*Assisted Chair of Sociology Department in grant research
*Requested newspaper and magazine articles and books
*Read articles and provided a synopsis for specified copies
*Organized and filed research articles to be readily accessible

OTHER EMPLOYMENT

Aug. 2002- **Student Employee**
Dec. 2002 Instructional Technology Services, University of Southern Indiana,
Evansville, IN
*Assisted customers with equipment requests
*Filed and faxed paperwork
*Contacted and assisted Distance Educational Students
*Delivered AV equipment to classes or special events on campus

Summer- **Client Service Worker**, Developmental Services Inc., Columbus, IN
2003
*Provided services to 3 mentally handicap clients ranging from
mildly to severely disabled
*Planned community activities with client(s)
*Tracked and administered medication
*Instructed client(s) on cooking, cleaning and self care

May 2000- **Ticket Sales/Shift Manager**, Great Escape 8 Theater, Seymour, IN
Dec. 2001
*Cashier for concession and ticket sales
*Promoted to shift manager and opened/closed the theater
*Counted and computed theater sales, faxed weekly paperwork,
and answered office telephone
*Managed customer service

AWARDS/EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

*Eli Lily Endowment Recipient (2000)
*Twenty-first Century Scholar (2000-2004)
*Academic Honors Student (2000)
*High Honors Recipient (2002)
*Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Women's Soccer Team Member (2000-2001)
*Student Body Representative on SMWC Counsel for hiring a new Vice President (2002)
*Sociology Club Member (2003)