2014

The Effect of Interpersonal Relationships on the Body Image of First Year, Women of Color Studying at Predominately White Undergraduate Institutions

Lauren Kross
Minnesota State University - Mankato

The Effect of Interpersonal Relationships on the Body Image of First Year, Women of Color Studying at Predominately White Undergraduate Institutions

By

Lauren Kross

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Gender and Women's Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

May 2014

The Effect of Interpersonal Relationships on the Body Image of First Year, Women of Color Studying at Predominately White Undergraduate Institutions

Lauren Kross

This Thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

Dr. Jocelyn Stitt, Advisor

Dr. Laura Harrison

Dr. Jennifer Pepperell

Abstract

"The Effect of Interpersonal Relationships on the Body Image of First Year, Women of Color Studying at Predominately White Undergraduate Institutions" by Lauren Kross, a 2014 graduate student in the Gender and Women's Studies Department at Minnesota State University Mankato, focuses on how relationships and peer groups positively or negatively impact the body image of first year women of color studying at Minnesota State University Mankato, a predominately white undergraduate institution. The first year of college is a time that students experience many changes in their environment, academics, interests, and identity development. Their previously formed and newly formed relationships play a big role in their identity development. Building on the work of student development scholars who suggest that women's relationships aid in identity development and, therefore, influence the actions and feelings of that individual, my research finds that the participants are more likely to have a positive body image if their peer groups and friends feel positively about their body image. In addition, the women who expressed having a positive body image also explained that they defend their body and their choices confidently in negative interactions or when receiving negative comments. This differs from other research suggesting that women of color attending predominately white undergraduate institutions develop coping mechanisms for dealing with racial tension and campus environment rather than resolving the conflict. The women in my research responded to negative interactions with peers using conflict resolution. However, the majority of the participants did not have negative interactions with peers of different races while attending school so far. I was surprised that only two participants expressed having any type of negative interaction with a peer since coming

to college. I think that this was due to the fact that many participants attended

predominately white high schools and came from predominately white local areas.

Acknowledgements

Throughout my research process, I have been overjoyed with the amount of support I have received from professors, coworkers, peers, students, friends, and family. I am grateful for those who have shaped my experience throughout graduate school as well as those who helped build the foundation for my advanced studies. Thank you.

First, I would like to thank my academic supporters. I cannot begin to express my appreciation for my Graduate Advisor and Thesis Committee Chair, Dr. Jocelyn Stitt. I am truly grateful for the support and guidance that I have received throughout my graduate career and thesis research project. I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Laura Harrison and Dr. Jennifer Pepperell. The time and energy you both put forth throughout this research process is greatly appreciated and certainly did not go unnoticed. In addition to my committee, I also need to thank the Gender and Women's Studies department. I would not be at this point in my graduate career without you challenging me to be my best and develop personally and academically.

Next, I would like to thank those who have helped me develop professionally throughout this experience. I would like to thank my Graduate Assistantship supervisor and mentor, Sara Granberg-Rademacker. You believed in me since Day 1 of my assistantship and helped cultivate an interest in Student Development and Higher Education, which inspired a large portion of my thesis research. In addition, I would like to thank the numerous supporters and mentors across the Minnesota State University Mankato campus, MSU Women's Center, the Center for Excellence and Teaching, and the YWCA-Mankato for providing opportunities for personal and professional development throughout my time here.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis research addresses the impact of homosocial relationships and peer groups on the body image of first year women of color studying at predominately white undergraduate institutions (PWUIs). I chose to look at how homosocial relationships and peer groups affect the body image of first year women of color studying at PWUIs because this specific topic is an area of feminist theory and student development theory that could use additional research. I have worked to close to this gap in the literature by conducting and evaluating my findings through a feminist lens. I argue that women of color who have peers and friends with positive body images also have positive body images of their own. Of the ten participants, only two women expressed having negative body images. These two women also had friends and peer groups with negative body images. Their friends and peers often indulged in body shaming and negative self-talk. On the other hand, women of color with friendships and peers with positive body images explained that their friends and peers were extremely accepting of all body types and always encouraged one another to embrace their body as is. Several of these women stated having higher self-esteem and more confidence in their body since coming to college. These results are interesting because previous research suggests that, "college women in the United States are particularly vulnerable to the development of body dissatisfaction…[and] between 25-40% of [college-age] women experience negative body image" (Snapp 211). The risk of developing body dissatisfaction amongst first year collegiate women is much higher because they are transitioning to a new social and academic environment (Snapp 211).

Before delving into the details of my project, it is necessary to define specific terms that I will with be using throughout my research. I am defining homosocial relationships as platonic relationships between members of the same sex. In my research, these platonic relationships are between females. I am defining women of color as any woman who racially identifies as something other than white. Finally, I am defining first year student as someone who has currently attempted or enrolled in less than 36 credits or enrolled in their first, post-secondary year of college. I chose 36 credits as an indicator for first year student status because 18 credits is the maximum allowed per semester. I also chose to state the phrase "or enrolled in their first, post-secondary year of college" because students may exceed 36 credits if they took college courses through concurrent enrollment (college in high schools) or college courses at a university or community college while still in high school. In addition, students were required to be over 18 years of age.

Three main bodies of knowledge situate my research in feminist theory and aided my research process. First, I examine literature regarding bodies and body image in feminist thought, analyzing and contextualizing theories from scholars including Susan Bartky, Kathy Davis, Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Bordo, and Andrea Dworkin. I utilize theories and ideas that address how the female body is Othered, how the female body is socially constructed, and the expectations of the female body within American culture. In addition, this body of knowledge addresses the internalization of thinness and the strict cultural guidelines the female body is assigned. Internalization of thinness occurs when the thin ideal is no longer separated from the self and "gets incorporated into the self" (Bartky 114). Strict cultural guidelines for the female body refers to the maintaining and

manicuring of the female body through daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly rituals like application of makeup, eyebrow waxing, shaving of the legs, and/or haircuts. This particular section relates to my thesis research because the ideals created for women's bodies and the way women feel about their bodies is central to my research. Second, I address how bodies of non-white races have been displayed and presented throughout history, specifically exploring the history of the Black female body. Theories and ideas from Audre Lorde, Linda Alcoff, Janelle Hobson, and others aide in the conversation about the bodies of women of color and the impact of racism and discrimination on the social construction of non-white bodies. In the past, non-white bodies have been "associated with freakery and deviance" and linked to various stereotypes, focusing on specific body parts and difference (Hobson 9). Even though there has been a shift from ugliness to exotic, the focus on difference and comparison to the white female body remains. Examining the impact race has on the body of women of color is relevant to my research because I focus on how women of color feel about their body and how racial stereotypes, expectations, and comparisons impacts their body image. Finally, I explore theories in interpersonal relationship and women's student development. Theories by Mary Belenky, Ruthellen Josselson, Annemarie Vaccaro, and Patricia Doherty and Ellen Cook allow me to explore the integral role identity, relationships, and empowerment play in the construction of college women's body image. Interpersonal relationships and women's student development theories are pertinent to my research because it allows me to understand the stages of identity development that my participants are going through during their collegiate experience and how relationships influence the identity of women. Theories discussing bodies and body image within feminist thought, racialized bodies,

and interpersonal relationships and women's student development situate my topic and allow me, as a researcher, and you, as a reader, to understand and challenge foundational ideas regarding the body image of first year women of color studying at a predominately white undergraduate institution. The historical and contemporary knowledge explored and critiques throughout my literature review aide in the analysis of my research findings.

In order to understand the impact of homosocial relationships and peer groups on the body image of first year women of color studying at PWUIs, I conducted ten in-depth interviews on the campus of Minnesota State University Mankato, a PWUI. Questions were open-ended and focused on specific ideas found within my three bodies of knowledge. Participants began by describing what they believed to be the ideal woman's body, how they describe their own body, and how others might see their body. Then, participants were asked a series of questions about studying at a predominately white undergraduate institution, body image and racial identity, body image and culture, and what they were taught about body and hair as it relates to their race. Finally, participants were asked multiple questions about their close friendships and peer groups and how these relationships impact their body image. I focused on women of color at a PWUI and body image because little feminist research is currently conducted on this population and topic. However, this means I will not be contributing to similar areas of research like body image and media, disordered eating, or white women and body image. Questions in these other areas were not asked during the interview because I focused on the role homosocial relationships and peer groups play in the construction of body image.

Throughout this thesis, I discuss the unique challenges that first year women of color face regarding their body image and identity development, an area of feminist

theory and student development theory that is lacking. It is important to address this gap in literature because action steps can be created and implemented as a result. Specific steps can be taken by PWUI administrators and feminists to ensure that first year women of color are supported and surrounded by body positive images and outreach initiatives in campus common areas, campus classrooms and residential community living spaces. In addition, this research will allow feminist theorists and student development theorists to think critically about how environment, mainstream and cultural body ideals, and norms impact the body image of first year women of color.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Hegemonic body ideals promote a woman's body that is often portrayed as white, thin, young, able, and feminine. When women venture outside of this ideal or reject wanting this ideal for their own body, women's bodies are deemed unacceptable or "met with distaste" (Bartky 105). Because women of color can never attain this idealized woman's body, they are often deemed as "primitive, savage, sexually animalistic, and indeed more bodily than the white races" in historical documents, within media outlets, and amongst Western United States societal beauty norms (Bordo 9). The idealized woman's body in relation to contemporary culture in the United States will be explored throughout this literature review. In addition, I will explore bodies and body image within feminist thought, racialized bodies, and student identity development and interpersonal relationship theories of women. For the purposes of my research, I am defining body image as "how individuals feel about and perceive their bodies" (Sheldon 279). Inner conception of appearance is constructed by memories, interactions, relationships, and feelings toward the body, which fosters negative or positive feelings toward the body and creates a negative or positive body image (What). Finally, I relate how these three bodies of knowledge work interdependently to support my thesis topic and research.

Gaining an understanding of how these three bodies of knowledge impact my thesis topic and coexist within my research is important. Throughout this literature review, I demonstrate how these bodies of knowledge collectively support my thesis topic. I focus on how these bodies of knowledge support the research that I collected by interviewing ten women of color studying at Minnesota State University Mankato, a predominately white undergraduate institution. Attaining knowledge regarding body

image within feminist thought, racialized bodies, and student identity development and interpersonal relationship theories of women allows me to contextualize and analyze my research through a feminist lens within my results chapter. Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Bordo, Kathy Davis, Andrea Dworkin, and Susan Bartky provide critical theories on the body and body image within feminist thought, allowing for a deeper understanding of how the female body has been socially constructed, evaluated, and cultured throughout time. Audre Lorde, Janelle Hobson, and Linda Alcoff provide theories on women of color, race, and racialized bodies which furthers the discussion of bodies in feminist thought and the ways in which the bodies of women of color differ from white female bodies. Finally, Josselson, Doherty and Cook, Belenky, and Vaccaro address the intertwining of identity development and interpersonal relationship theory amongst women, allowing for a deeper understanding of how these two ideas affect female college students.

Bodies and Body Image in Feminist Thought

Bodies have been theorized, deconstructed, and challenged throughout the evolution of feminism and feminist thought. Bodies have shaped and evolved as a product of culture because "culture predetermines who we are, how we behave, what we are willing to know, [and] what we are willing to feel," (Dworkin 34). In turn, the ideal woman's body has been morphed and constructed throughout the evolution of society and societal expectations of women. This section of my literature review will address the woman's body as Other, the socially constructed woman's body, and the manipulation of women's bodies. This section relates to my thesis research because body image is central

to my topic. In order to investigate how women feel about their bodies and how interpersonal relationships shape their body image, I must first delve into the complexity of bodies and body image within feminist theory.

Women's bodies are often compared to men's bodies. Davis argues that the female body is representative of "nature, emotionality, irrationality and sensuality" while men have been associated with "the locus of social power, rationality, and self-control" (Davis 5). Therefore, the woman's body is Other, in need of discipline and control (Davis 5). De Beauvoir stated similar sentiments in her work, arguing that "humanity is male and man defined woman not in herself but as relative to him" and she is not regarded as a full, independent person (de Beauvoir xxxix). When women are regarded as Other, a woman's body never really belongs to her. De Beauvoir argues that the female is body is something controlled by the outside, controlled by society which is controlled by man (de Beauvoir 30). Similarly, Ortner states that "women are being identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture" and, in turn, how people of that culture view that society and societal norms (Ortner 204). If man attains control over the culture and societal norms, then the female body is at the mercy of what is deemed acceptable for the female body. In addition, women's bodies are expected to look and perform in a particular way, something that has transformed throughout time. Bordo argues that "the body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then woman are that negativity, whatever it may be" and in need of bodily expectations (Bordo 5). Societal expectations for women's bodies have fostered the need for control and discipline for attaining the ideal woman's body. The attainment of an

ideal woman's body has not disappeared but intensified over time, creating a fixation on the need for bodily alterations and constant upkeep of the female body.

Characteristics of the ideal woman's body or gender norms associated with the female body and femininity did not appear organically nor were they created haphazardly. Ideas about thinness, whiteness, youthfulness, femininity, and beauty within American culture were all socially constructed throughout American history and continue to be maintained and challenged today. Within today's American culture, women and girls are encouraged to have a "slender body; flawless (and more often than not white) skin; delicate, even facial features, enhanced by makeup; [and] carefully coifed hair" (Lipkin 41). These features are described in relation to 21st Century femininity, something American media and culture encourages women and girls to strive for through appearing and acting a particular way. Many people view "femininity as an artifice, an achievement" and a goal worth pursuing (Bartky 105). Bartky argues that it is expected that women participate fully in femininity norms, causing them to "[internalize] patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability" (Bartky 113). Bartky explains that this internalization process occurs when "it gets incorporated into the structure of the self" and it becomes a piece of the identity, construction, and makeup of an individual (Bartky 114). This means that standards of beauty and body ideal constructed by men and through patriarchal thought have become encrypted in the thoughts and actions of many women today. However, women's body ideals are not just conformed to and internalized by women, but "embedded in the immediacies of everyday, lived experiences" (Davis 15). Davis argues that we should think of bodies as central pieces of everyday life and a means to exploring, exposing and understanding the embodied experiences of women.

Through my in-depth interviews, I collected information from women of color about how they conceptualize their body and interact with their body. This allows me to understand the experiences women have with their bodies and how their experiences impact their body image.

Women's bodies have been given strict cultural guidelines to abide by. Bordo argues that the female body has been a "'colonized' territory, not a site for individual self-determinism" meaning that the body has been controlled, manipulated, and placed under the surveillance of others (Bordo 21). For this reason, "not one part of a woman's body is left untouched, unaltered" (Dworkin 113). Dworkin argues that culture constructs the idea that "women must be beautiful and Woman is Beauty" and, therefore, "no price is too great, no process too repulsive, no operation too painful for the woman who would be beautiful" (Dworkin 115). From her eyebrows to her underarms to her fingernails to her aging skin, the female body must be continuously manipulated and manicured to maintain cultural expectations. The female body in particular has become something that is to be controlled by the individual but, in reality, is at the mercy of culture and societal expectations. Davis supports the idea that culture deems bodies inhabited by women to be imperfect and that "the body is a machine to be repaired, maintained or enhanced" (Davis 2). Similarly, Bordo argues that it is "through routine, habitual activity, our bodies learn what is 'inner' and what is 'outer,' which gestures are forbidden and which are required, how much inviolable are the boundaries of our bodies, how much space around the body can be claimed, and so on" (Bordo 16). In turn, all women attempting to uphold Western standards of beauty and bodily acceptability fail because, no matter what, the idealized Western women's body is always in need of

upkeep, repair, or enhancement. During my interviews, I asked specific questions targeting some of these ideas about upkeep, enhancement, and alteration. The women in my target population discussed daily bodily enhancement like makeup application as well as strictly fantasized alterations, enhancements that they may be interested in but would not partake in, like plastic surgery. Understanding how often the participants in my research think about or partake in bodily enhancement allowed me to delve into how this impacts the way in which they see their body and/or the way they describe their body.

Racialized Bodies

Historically, the bodies of women of color have been compared to the bodies of white women. Bodily expectations for women of color have often been similar to that of white women, making it impossible for perfection or attainment of the ideal body to be reached by women of color. Oftentimes, the experiences of women of color have been neglected. Lorde argues that because the experiences of women of color have been left out, "women of color become 'other,' the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend" (Lorde 117). This section of my literature review explores the Othering of women of color, presentation of non-European bodies, and expectations in relation to upkeep or alteration of the body for women of color. This body of knowledge relates to my research because I uncover the additional pressures women of color face with the body when studying at a predominately white undergraduate institution.

Women of color have been in comparison to that of the white, European woman's body throughout history. Hobson argues that in contemporary white dominated patriarchal societies women are valued by their physical appearance and compared to

beauty standards based on whiteness (Hobson 7). Therefore, Western cultures are comparing women of color to white women's bodies because the white woman's body is regarded as the beauty elite or norm within historical and contemporary white dominated patriarchal societies. In the wake of European colonization, women of color, Black women in particular, were "associated with freakery and deviance" and linked to "stereotypes like 'Hottentot Venus,' 'Jezebel,' 'Mammy,'" and others that deem the black body as a spectacle and presentation of bodily difference (Hobson 9). Similarly, Gilman documents that "while many groups of African Blacks were known to Europeans in the nineteenth century, the Hottentot [and other related images] remained representative of the essence of the black, especially the black female" (Gilman 225). Stereotypes like Hottentot Venus and Jezebel, chosen by Europeans to represent Black women, reinforce difference while publically critiquing and dehumanizing bodies that are non-white. In addition, these icons generalized the appearance of Black women, created an expectation for what the Black female body should look like, and compared the Black female body to that of the ideal, white female body maintained by white dominated patriarchal societies.

Icons like Hottentot Venus and Jezebel were not just used to reinforce difference, but "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice to appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins 69). Similarly, Alcoff argues that "differences can also be exaggerated, manipulated, and used opportunistically to coerce conformism and excuse corruption" meaning that differences are often highlighted in order to encourage non-white individuals and groups of people to adapt to the white population and hide the mistreatment and discrimination performed by the white population (Acloff 5). Racist European ideas have associated the Black

woman's body with specific body parts like the breasts and the buttocks, symbolizing hypersexuality and ugliness of the African race (Hobson 1). This was not by accident. Hobson argues that white, male colonists, slave owners, explorers, and leaders "labeled the black female body as 'grotesque,' 'strange,' 'unfeminine,' 'lascivious,' and 'obscene'" because the physical bodies of these women differed from that of white female bodies (Hobson 88). In order to legitimize the Western standards of beauty and bodily acceptance, bodies outside of the white woman ideal were labeled to convince society that these bodies were not only different; they were bad, grotesque, and ugly. Collins argues that images of Black women were described and labeled in particular ways "because the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power" and exercising power allows elite groups, or dominating groups, to "manipulate ideas about Black womanhood" or people outside of the dominating group (Collins 69). Preserving ideas and images of "Black women as Other provides ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression" (Collins 69). In addition, labels and imagery of women of color were used to homogenize or "smooth out all racial, ethnic, and sexual 'differences' that disturbed Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual expectations and identifications" associated with the body (Bordo 24). In turn, these labels normalize the ideal white female body and create a good/bad dichotomy amongst female bodies. Collins argues, "binary thinking…categorizes people, things, and ideas in terms of their difference from one another [and] gains meaning only in relation to its counterpart" (Collins 70). Therefore, the ideal white female body only gains meaning or validity when compared to bodies that are physically, racially, ethnically, or culturally different.

Racialized bodies were constructed throughout time and continue to evolve today. Alcoff argues that one's "racial identity is not a product of 'race'…but is historically evolving and culturally contextual" (Alcoff 195). Therefore, the body labels and stereotypes associated with women of color have been socially constructed to uphold a white standard of beauty. Recently, the bodies of women of color have been presented in a new, non-grotesque way. However, women of color today are oftentimes situated in an exotic fashion or eroticized within the American media rather than the previous association of distaste and disgust (Hobson 9). Hobson argues that even though there has been a shift from ugliness and grotesque to celebration of curves and realness of bodies of women of color, women of color are still deemed as Other or exotic in comparison to white women's bodies (Hobson 102). Additionally, women of color are still being sexualized, eroticized, dehumanized, and condensed to specific body parts, including breasts, buttocks, and thighs. During my interviews, I inquired about specific body parts and how participants' peer groups impact their thoughts about alterations to the overall body and/or alterations to specific body parts. In contrast, I asked questions about celebration of the body and whether or not the participants embrace their own body.

Student Identity Development and Interpersonal Relationship Theories of Women

Woman's identity plays a key role in self-esteem and the building of relationships, especially during the collegiate years. Self-esteem can be defined as the "overall affective evaluation of one's worth, value, or importance," which is determined by the individual (Robinson 115). A person's self-esteem is variable and is able to grow and transform over time. Josselson states that identity is "fundamentally interwoven with

others to gain meaning" and that the relationships formed are critical to identity development amongst women (Josselson 11). Because identity development and interpersonal relationship theories often intertwine, it is appropriate to examine these theories in conjunction with one another. This section of my literature review will address women and identity development, homosocial relationships of women, and empowerment of college women. Identity development refers to the "behavioral and psychological changes that are affected by the people and situations surrounding the" individual (Sengupta 232). This applies to the research that I conducted because I am investigating the impact that homosocial relationships and peer groups has on the body image of first year women of color.

Identity is not created overnight nor is it unalterable. According to Josselson, "identity is the interface between the individual and the world" (Josselson 3). In addition, Josselson argues that the formation of identity is something that gradually occurs and is shaped throughout one's life (Josselson 11). Because this is a lifelong process, identity development is extremely important to an individual's life decisions and aspirations. Josselson also points out that women's identity interlocks with personal choices, goals, and values and contributes to how she makes decisions about her life as well as her body (Josselson 3). These ideas are pertinent when looking at the women's identity in relation to self-concept, or the way one feels about the self, and the relationships women establish with others. I incorporated these ideas into my research by asking specific interview questions about the woman's identity and how her identity impacts relationships and body image.

Western culture tends to value independence and lifestyles that center around individual goals. However, self-in-relation theory "argues that relationships are such an integral part of women's psychological functioning that it is inaccurate to define women's selves as somehow autonomous and separate from others" (Doherty 17). Doherty and Cook argue that women rely upon relationships in order to define their own identity and how they feel about the self (Doherty 17). Additionally, Doherty and Cook state that many women "experience a sense of empowerment and 'zest' that derives from relational connections" and that these connections allow for the individual woman to recognize herself as unique, empathetic, and strong (Doherty 17). This theory emphasizes the need for belonging and acceptance amongst women in the college setting, friendships, and peer groups because these relationships are key factors for identity development during the college years. Time spent in college is often "noted as a time of rapid and significant identity development" in areas including "development of competence, the movement through autonomy toward independence, and the development of mature interpersonal relationships" (Sengupta 233). It is important to recognize that many women rely upon interpersonal relationships and peer groups to better understand the self and the position that she, as an individual, holds. Similarly, Sengupta argues that women college students rely upon their relationships to "act autonomously…and find competence in their own self as validated by and in relation to others" (Sengupta 233). Therefore, identity for the woman college student is developed and defined in relation to other people or things (Sengupta 233). Self-in-relation theory leads me to believe that the women participating in my research rely upon their homosocial relationships and peer groups to feel accepted and valued.

Empowerment of women college students is extremely important in the success of women in college settings. In a series of interviews conducted by Belenky et al., "most women interviewed made it clear that they did not wish to be told merely that they had the capacity or potential to become knowledgeable or wise" but rather that they "knew something…that there was something good inside them" (Belenky et al 195). The women interviewed by Belenky et al. felt that it was not enough to be told that knowledge was possible for them; that they needed to understand that they were already knowledgeable and their knowledge was worthy of praise (Belenky et al. 195). In a similar study, Vaccaro interviewed white women and women of color to assess the different entering levels of self-esteem and self-investment in higher education as well as the developed levels of self-esteem and self-investment of these women during their college experience. Vaccaro defines self-investment as "the valuing of oneself enough to believe that personal growth, learning, and development is not merely needed but deserved" (Vaccaro 114). Although this may be linked to self-esteem or self-concept, Vaccaro emphasizes that the idea of self-investment is specific to education because it is developed in conjunction with academic and personal growth (Vaccaro 114). Both Vaccaro and Belenky emphasize the importance of empowerment and support of women college students, the valuing of women's knowledge, and criticalness of positive feedback and validity of success. Empowerment is critical in the success of women on college campuses and, upon completion of my research, I will outline action steps that college campuses and student affairs professionals can utilize to empower first year women of color studying on predominately white campuses. I believe that investing in resources and outreach for women of color in regards to body image is critical to their

success and retention because the better one feels about the self, the better one will do in other areas of life.

Conclusion

Bodies and body image in feminist thought, racialized bodies, and student identity development and interpersonal relationship theories of women serve as independent and interdependent ideas for my thesis research. These three bodies of knowledge provide foundational knowledge for me to conduct qualitative research for my analysis of my results. Without such knowledge, my results would have no basis or backing of theory. My first body of knowledge, bodies and body image in feminist thought, centralizes historic and contemporary knowledge regarding the female body, deconstructs the female body, and allows for a better understanding of the expectations and idolization of particular female bodies. This body of knowledge equipped me with the understanding of the female body and how body image is constructed within feminist thought, which helped formulate questions about bodies and body image that I asked my interviewees during in depth interviews. My second body of knowledge, racialized bodies, addresses the ways in which women of color have been historically dehumanized and degraded by public displays of the body and eroticized through current media and literature. This body of knowledge allowed me to formulate questions about race in relation to the body and women of color and body image. My final body of knowledge, student identity development and interpersonal relationship theories of women, investigates the role relationships play in the formation of women's identity and how empowerment of college women is critical to their success. This body of knowledge provided me with the

opportunity to venture across disciplines to understand how identity and relationship

theory impacts body image through a feminist lens. This research allowed me to ask more

in depth questions about how homosocial relationships and peer groups impact the body

image of first year women of color.

Chapter 3: Methodology

For many women, discussing the body and body image can be a very sensitive topic. It may be a sensitive topic for many reasons, but most often it can trigger negative thoughts or fears about the body or bring up past experiences with the body that were harmful. Through traditional and social media outlets, advertising and marketing tactics within the media, and societal pressure, women often learn what is considered beautiful and ideal through a very narrow lens. Western European and American media and culture "reflect certain physical 'standards' for girls and women—that thinness is attractive [and] that clear skin and certain kinds of Caucasian features are beautiful" (Lipkin 42). Societal expectations are often based upon consumption of media and internalization of the thin ideal from a young age. Young girls and women grow up seeing and internalizing "endless images of alluring, flirtatious, slender, [and] usually white…young women" in magazines, movies, television, internet, and social media (Lipkin 42). Bodies outside of the ideal are usually encouraged to conform as much as possible. When women do not conform, their bodies are often publically criticized or discriminated against, particularly when the body is obese, disabled, performing outside of gender roles, or considered a racial minority in that culture or society.

Before exploring my methodological practices, it is important to define some terminology that will be utilized throughout this thesis. I am defining homosocial relationships as platonic relationships between members of the same sex. In my research, these platonic relationships are between females. I am defining women of color as any woman who racially identifies as something other than white. I am defining first year student as someone who has currently attempted or enrolled in less than 36 credits or

enrolled in their first, post-secondary year of college. I chose 36 credits as an indicator

for first year student status because 18 credits is the maximum allowed per semester. I

also chose to state or enrolled in their first, post-secondary year of college because

students may exceed 36 credits if they took college courses through concurrent

enrollment (college in high schools) or college courses while still in high school. I am

defining predominately white undergraduate institutions (PWUIs) as universities with a

mostly white student population. Minnesota State University Mankato, the university

utilized in my research, has a student population of over 18,000 students but only 1,700

students identify as students of color at the university (Minnesota).

Methods of Interviewing

I employed a feminist methodology by conducting and analyzing my interviews

through a feminist lens, implementing feminist interviewing techniques, practicing

reflexivity, and utilizing feminist knowledge from three distinct bodies of knowledge. It

is important to utilize a feminist perspective and feminist ethics throughout the entire

research process because feminist research "should be guided by feminist ethical

principles, which should inform the selection and design of the research programs,

strategies for gathering, and interpreting of evidence" (Jaggar 457). Recognizing my own

ethics and biases in the research process is important for conducting research that will

impact others. Ethics and personal biases were especially important during the initial

stages of research and submitting my research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

Understanding the risks and impacts that my participants may experience was important

and necessary for a project involving human subjects. It was also necessary for me to

implement feminist interviewing techniques, which include creating interview questions, deciding on an interview style, recruiting participants, probing during the interview, and my own role within the research. These techniques are considered feminist because they allowed me to uncover the "subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated" (Hesse-Biber 184). Discovering new knowledge about women's lives allows feminist researchers to add to the conversation of that particular subject or address a gap within the literature. Finally, I utilized knowledge from three theoretical bodies of knowledge including feminist theories on the body, feminist theories of race and the body, and feminist student development and relationship theory to construct interview questions, hypotheses, and arguments for my research. In addition, these theories have aided in the contextualization and analysis of my results.

I gained insight on this subject and population by doing a qualitative research project. I conducted in-depth interviews on ten women of color studying at Minnesota State University-Mankato. I did not seek participants identifying as a specific race, which allowed a variety of women of color to express interest in my research project. The participants in my research self identified as African American, Mexican American, and Asian. Participants self identified their race, along with a few other identifying factors, on the consent form. This confirmed that they were at least 18 years old, a first year student at Minnesota State University-Mankato, and identifying as a woman of color prior to the start of the interview. Upon completion of the consent form, participants were reminded that their responses during the interview and on the consent form are confidential. The identities of the participants is not revealed within this thesis and protected by using only initials to differentiate the women.

I recruited participants for my research through flyers on campus, university organizations, learning communities, residential life, instructor emails, university listservs, and presenting about my research in various introductory classes including Gender and Women's Studies, Social Work, Sociology, Communication Studies, English, and Ethnic Studies. Only one participant was recruited through snowball sampling, which occurs when you ask participants to provide contact information for other students who may be interested in being involved in your research project. The majority of my participants were recruited through classroom visits in the Social and Behavioral Sciences. I believe that this was the most effective way to recruit participants because the potential participants were able to see me as a person rather than an email in their inbox or flyer on the wall. In addition, students in Social and Behavioral Sciences are probably more likely to have an interest in social justice, activism, and Social and Behavioral Science based research because these areas are discussed within their current coursework.

I chose in-depth interviewing as a method for my research because it allows feminist researchers to "gain insight into the world of their participants" and attain rich, detailed explanations about a particular topic (Hesse-Biber 185). I chose ten participants because of my allotted time to conduct and transcribe the interviews. In addition, this allows for generalizability of my sample to the greater first year, women of color population studying at Minnesota State University Mankato. All interviews were one-on-one, recorded, and conducted in a private space on campus. All participants were provided consent to being a participant and granted confidentiality prior to the start of the interview. This also provided the opportunity to discuss any questions about the research process and further explain how the interview would be conducted. All interview

questions, recruitment methods, consent forms, and required documents for researching human subjects were approved by the Institutional Review Board in December 2013.

I employed a semi-structured interview, which utilizes a "specific interview guide—a list of written questions that I need to cover within a particular interview" (Hesse-Biber 187). This style of interviewing appealed to me because it allowed me, as the researcher, to have some control over the interview, like what questions were asked and what aspects of body image were important for my research, but also freedom and flexibility during the actual interview. Anticipating freedom and flexibility allows the questions to be asked in various orders, participant responses to answer multiple questions, and probing of specific areas to be appropriate. I utilized various acts of probing during my interviews, including silence, echoing, noises such as "uh huh," and leading the participant to answer the question more specifically by asking "why" or "can you tell me more about that?" (Hesse-Biber 198) These acts of probing allowed the participants to feel more comfortable with exposing personal life experiences and show "that you are listening and supporting their telling of their story" (Hesse-Biber 198). In addition, it made the interview feel less formal and more conversational, which allowed the participants to expose their thoughts and ideas in a natural, open manner. Finally, I chose to utilize probing in my interviews because of the topic's sensitivity. Body image and feelings about the body can be very difficult for some women to talk about and expose to others let alone to someone that they have never met before. Probing was a physical way to let the participants to know that I am genuinely interested in what they have to say and that I validate their thoughts, ideas, and feelings about their own body and the bodies of others.

I was an outsider to the women. My age and racial identity were two factors that distanced me from my participants. Due to these known differences, I attempted to relate to where they are developmentally by contacting them by mostly text messages, using more informal language when communicating with them, meeting at a place that was comfortable and familiar to them, and talking casually prior to the interview. It was important for me to make my participants feel comfortable before, during and after the interview because of my genuine interest in their thoughts and ideas as well as the sensitivity of the subject matter. Prior to the interview, I was upfront with my participants about my responses during the interview. I informed them that I may not respond as casually as a regular conversation and that I intentionally using body language and cues like "mmhmm" to show that I am listening but not responding with my own thoughts or ideas about what is being said. I also let them know that they could ask me for clarification at any point. During the interview, I remained cognizant of my body language and responses because I anticipated that some of the questions may cause discomfort for participants or provoke them to think about negative experiences. If I noticed that a participant was hesitant to open up about a particular topic, I made her feel safe to continue by offering head nods or facial expressions. I feel that my approach was successful because after most interviews the women were genuinely interested in my research, the research process, my topic, and possible next steps.

I utilized a feminist interview framework when developing open-ended questions for my interviews. A feminist interview framework is unlike other types of interviews because the information gathered specifically addresses the lives of women and other oppressed groups, advances social justice and social change, and recognizes the power

dynamic between the researcher and participants (Hesse-Biber 189). I asked open-ended questions about body image, race in relation to body image, and how the interactions and conversations that the participant has with peers and friends impacts their body image. These categories allowed me to discuss the influence of interpersonal relationships on the body image of first year women of color studying at a predominately white undergraduate institution and the action steps that need to occur in order to support this population of the university. In addition, these different categories of questions led to particular themes in my research including environment, ideals, norms, and resistance to mainstream beauty ideals. These themes are explored in greater depth in my results chapter.

All interviews started with personal questions about body image. I chose to begin with personal questions about body image because the questions focused on the participant as an individual and their feelings about their own experiences. Also, these questions allowed for trust to build before delving into more sensitive topics. Participants discussed and described how they felt about their own body, how others might view their body, comparisons to other bodies, potential alterations to their body, and what has impacted their body and body image. Several participants said that describing their body in three words was particularly difficult because they never attached particular words to their body before. I incorporated this question into the interview because it changed the dynamic of questions and provided an opportunity to intentionally probe about why they chose the particular words to describe their body. This question provided interesting results for the participants with positive body images versus the participants with negative body images. The participants that expressed having a positive body image

responded with words that described their body both positively and negatively. These words included words included, toned, un-proportionate, lanky, small, flawing, imperfect, thin, light, tall, muscular, compact, nice, curvy, tan, fit, athletic, weird, beautiful, an athletic body, thick, beautiful, decent. The participants who expressed having a negative body image responded with words that described their body in a more negative way. These words included, no curves, skinny, flat, not too skinny, not too big, and in the middle. Although the words used by women with negative body images may not appear to be negative by some, the participants explained that these words described attributes of their own body that they believed to be negative.

Once the participant finished answering personal questions about the body, I asked questions about race in relation to body image. At this point in the interview, we had a solid foundation to work from and questions that may invoke stronger emotions or feelings were easier to discuss. Questions regarding race allowed me to understand whether or not race impacts the participant's body image, if she compares her body to others of the same race or a different race, if she thinks that bodies of her race are fairly represented in the media, and whether or not she thinks that being around predominately white peers affects her body image. Entering the interview process, I expected to better understand how the women felt about their hair in relation to their race and how lessons about hair care from family members and/or peers impacted their overall body image. However, I did not expect to hear multiple participants discuss the impact of cultural food on the body and body image.

The final set of questions focused on interpersonal relationships and experiences with peers in relation to body image. I ended with questions regarding friendships and

peers because it is often easier to talk about the self in relation to the self rather than the self in relation to others. At this point in the interview, trust is at the highest possible level for an interview. Therefore, questions about friends and peers may be easier to answer because trust with the researcher is established. If questions about friends or peers were asked earlier in the interview, the participant may feel the need to protect their friends and peers in a way that they may not once they trust you and what you are doing with the information gathered. Questions about interpersonal relationships in relation to race allowed me to understand the impact of relationships on her body image, whether or not her peers encourage positive or negative thoughts about her body, how she feels about her body when interacting with peers and friends, and whether or not these relationships have changed since coming to college. During this portion of the interview, I expected to hear more negative interactions with peers and friends on a predominately white campus. However, the majority of the participants expressed never having a negative interaction or only an interaction that was a misunderstanding that needed clarified. The participants expressed having peers and friends that embraced their body and encouraged them to have a positive body image. The participants who described their body image as negative also had friends and peers with negative body images. The participants with negative body images remarked that their friends and peers often participated in body shaming and desire to alter the body. On the other hand, participants who described their body image as positive also had friends and peers with positive body images. The participants with positive body images explained that their friends and peers often complimented them on their body and encouraged them to embrace their body in

the current state. Questions regarding peers and friends uncovered the fact that interpersonal relationships definitely impact body image in a positive or negative way.

The consent form provided demographic information, including year and major in college, age, race, and gender. The interview questions allowed me to gather in-depth information regarding body image, race in relation to body image, and interpersonal relationships, including peers and close friendships. However, I neglected to ask specific demographic questions in the consent form and within the interview itself, including sexual orientation, class, immigrant status, and hometown. Due to the fact that I did not collect this demographic information, I am unable to analyze this research using an intersectional approach, which serves as a limitation for this research. The only answers regarding sexual orientation and immigration status of parents were answered organically through the interview, meaning that the interviews were forthcoming with these demographics instead of asked. I did not ask participants demographic questions beyond age, gender, and race because I did not anticipate utilizing that information in my results. However, demographic information regarding class, sexual orientation, body size, ability, or other identity factors would allow for analysis of the role intersecting identities play in the body image of first year women of color studying at a PWUI.

Interview Analysis

Once all interviews were conducted, I transcribed the interviews. Transcribing each interview provided the opportunity to engage with the interview content intimately rather than attempting to actively listen, ask questions, probe, and record. As I transcribed interviews, I highlighted interesting responses in each category of questions. This aided

in my discovery of what was important and noteworthy in each interview. After all interviews were transcribed and I had a list of interesting points and ideas from the interviews, I identified four distinct areas to explore in greater depth, including environment, norms, ideals, and resistance. Categorizing ideas into four main areas allowed me to explore how each of these areas impacted the body image of first year women of color studying at a PWUI. For each transcribed interview, I highlighted interesting points stated within the interview for each area, which allowed me to pull quotes and ideas for each area while writing my results chapter and refer to specific areas of the interview quickly and easily.

I utilized feminist theory and content from my bodies of knowledge to analyze the experiences with body image of first year women of color studying at a PWUI. Feminist theory and understanding of body image within feminist thought allowed me to identify when experiences confirmed and challenged ideas about body image in previous literature. This was important for my research because it was my intention to understand the lived experiences of first year women of color. Within the subsections of my results, I address how the participants had different experiences with body image and interpersonal relationships as well as why this may have been different from participant to participant. In addition, I looked at how some women had similar experiences with body image and what factors may have resulted in a similar experience.

Identity and Reflexivity

Feminist research emphasizes the importance of reflexivity. Reflexivity is important when conducting research because it "allows researchers to be aware of their

status differences along gender, race, ethnicity, class, and any other factors that might be important to the research process" (Hesse-Biber 215). Therefore, my identity is an important factor to consider and necessary to expose before delving into thoughts and ideas about my research. I am a white, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgendered woman. These areas of my identity affect the way in which I view my own body in comparison to that of the socially constructed ideal body, the way in which others perceive my body, the way in which others approve or reject my body, the feelings that I have towards my own body, and the decisions that I make for my body. My education in Sociology and Gender and Women's Studies has impacted the way I view particular social issues facing women's bodies and the gendered lens in which I evaluate such issues. My professional experience as an activist, advisor, educator, and volunteer has shaped the way that I view feminist issues facing women's bodies, empowerment of women and girls, and social justice. Finally, I anticipated that my status as an outsider, a researcher who has a different identity than the research participants, would increase the possibility of unique challenges for my research. This allowed me to accept the fact that recruitment was challenging initially. It is important to reflect during all phases of research because these factors impact the way in which I think about research, conduct research, and analyze results.

I chose the topic of body image and bodies amongst college women because of my own experience with the body, the ups and downs I have encountered by being in this body, and the way my relationships impacted my body image in college. In addition, my passion for empowering other women and girls to embrace their body influenced my decision to further research body image. Throughout my life, I have witnessed body

shaming, bodily distaste and negativity, and rejection of the body time and time again by women I admire, love, and respect. I have experienced negativity in relation to the body amongst family members, close friends, peers, colleagues, students, and acquaintances of all ages. I chose to further investigate how the body image of first year undergraduate women of color is affected by interpersonal relationships on predominately white undergraduate institutions because of my interest and exposure to the impact of body image. I narrowed my population to first year women of color studying at a predominately white undergraduate institution because I discovered a gap in literature excluding this population from the research already conducted and I have an interest in the identity development of first year students.

During the interview, I anticipated that participants may feel nervous disclosing personal information and may anticipate lack of empathy with me because of our differing identities. I attempted to lessen this limitation by legitimizing what the participants exposed through listening cues and allowing participants to ask me questions about my body image and identity. Upon completion of the interview, it was not uncommon for us to continue discussing the research further. I found that several participants were genuinely interested in the project and curious as to how I became interested in the subject matter. In addition, this allowed the participants to better understand research and the research process.

My identity impacts the way I analyze the results, which is different than someone of a different identity interpreting the same data. I have attempted to lessen the limitation of my identity influence on my analysis by practicing reflexivity and discussing how my identity impacts specific aspects of my analysis like the choosing of themes and

important quotations. By conducting in-depth interviews, I have gained insight to how interpersonal relationships impact the body image of first year women of color attending a predominately white undergraduate institution. By utilizing feminist theory and methodology in my collection of data, I will be able to analyze my results through a feminist lens and produce research based upon feminist values and ethics. Finally, my use of reflexivity continues to allow me to understand my role within my research and the influence my identity has on the research that I have conducted and analyzed.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will explore the lived experiences of ten first year women of color attending Minnesota State University Mankato, a predominately white undergraduate institution. I will discuss the unique challenges that these women face regarding their body image and identity development. One of the most interesting findings was that the majority of first year women of color in my research tend to feel more positively about their body image. Also, they expressed having body positive peer groups and homosocial relationships that encouraged them to embrace their body. Only 20 percent of the participants in my research expressed having a negative body image. This challenges mainstream body ideal norms because studies show that "between 25-40% of [college] women experience negative body image" (Snapp 220). Another interesting finding in my research was only two participants expressed having a negative interaction with peers of another race since coming to college. This may be due to the fact that many of the participants attended predominately white high schools and grew up in mostly white local areas. Additional findings within this research include the impact of cultural foods on body image and the impact of norms on construction of appearance.

I will focus on four overarching areas within this chapter including environment, ideals, norms, and resistance to mainstream body image ideals. First, I discuss the experiences of ten first year women of color attending Minnesota State University Mankato, a predominately white undergraduate institution (PWUI). I will analyze how their new or familiar environment impacts their body image and identity development. Second, I will discuss how the women in my research describe their own body in comparison to their definition of the ideal woman's body and how body ideals impact the

participant's body image. Even though 80 percent of the participants in my research had positive body images, none of the women described their own body as ideal. Then, I will describe how norms learned throughout their life by relatives and/or peers as well as current norms, new interactions and lessons learned since being on campus, impact their body image. The women in my research discussed how race influences the way they feel about and present their body, facial appearance, and hair. Several women also expressed cultural foods impacting the way they feel about their body and as a source of tension when going home or visiting family. Finally, I will elaborate on how eight out of ten participants in my research challenge current body ideal norms by being confident in their bodies and describing their body image as being positive. I will support my findings by utilizing direct quotes from my participants and integrating feminist analysis through theories explored in my literature review.

Of the ten participants in my research, four identified as African American, four identified as Asian, and two identified as Mexican American. To protect the identity of my participants, I will be referring to the women in my research by their initials. The women in my research got involved in my research because of a class recruitment presentation, which was conducted in a variety of classes typically taken by first year students. This aided in the diversity of my participant involvement because most participants were not within the same peer groups and did not have the same close friendships. I did not recruit women of a specific racial identity, which organically produced a variety of women to participate in my research. As stated in my methodology chapter, I did not collect demographic information beyond age, gender, and race, which limits my analysis of identity and body image within my results section.

Environment

Within the past six months, the participants in my research have transitioned to a new stage in life and are currently experiencing the challenges of being a first year student. I speculate that for many of these women, college was their first experience living away from home and living on their own. Several of the women discussed how their body image had changed since coming to college and how their confidence had increased. DS, a first year African American woman, described her experience as a confirmation of self. She lived in the same town for her entire life and saw the same people for so long that coming to college was a welcomed change. She said that moving on campus "let me know that you're not the only tall person in the world so don't worry." Seeing tall peers, some who were even much taller than her, allowed her to feel more secure in her body and not feel like she was the only tall peer in the group. YN, a first year Asian American woman, described her previous body image as negative, but had experienced a positive change when coming to college. YN described her new environment on campus as more relaxed and comfortable. She said, "I'm more confident and wear whatever I wanna wear" on campus. Despite her increased confidence, she still believes that she lacks bodily improvement and self esteem. Not only does she see the deficits in her body but hopes that she is not stuck in her current bodily state forever. YN's experience is different than DS's experience with coming to college because YN still feels insecure in her body while DS feels secure. Although they both have had an increase in confidence, only one feels more secure in her body since coming to college. This demonstrates that change is different for different students and identity development and self-esteem is an ongoing transformation.

Women of color attending a predominately white school experience additional changes and challenges in their transition from high school to college. Sengupta argues that women of color studying at mostly white colleges experience the same challenges faced by typical first year students like living on their own for the first time and tackling new academic expectations. However, they also have to be "navigating their identity development as women and women of a particular (or multiple) racial and ethnic background" (Sengupta 235). Although many students anticipate the transition that will occur in college, many changes are unexpected and can challenge the identity expectations learned throughout childhood and adolescence. For four of the participants, this was their first time attending a school that was mostly white. For these students, those who did not attend a predominately white high school or grow up in a predominately white town, discussed more of the racial tension felt on campus as well as the expectation to match the appearance of white students as closely as possible. Although some of the women discussed the expectation to appear more like the white students, none of the women attending a predominately white school for the first time expressed having negative interactions with peers of other races since being on campus.

NY, a first year Asian American student, explained that being on a predominately white campus creates pressure and expectations for her appearance. In order to fit in with others at a predominately white university, NY feels like she has to follow certain trends or wear certain brands in order to fit in. For example, NY feels pressure to emulate the appearance of white students by wearing UGG boots or applying makeup. She stated, "I just have to match up to their standards in terms of body because maybe naturally they already look really nice so…I have to wear makeup to look as good as them." NY may

believe that her white peers "naturally" look nice because of internalized racism and

media messages regarding white women and hegemonic beauty standards. Susan Bordo

describes the white assimilation that NY is doing, wearing UGG boots and fixing her

appearance to look a way that she desires, is to fit in with her white peers and to

"participate in a process of racial normalization," which makes it more difficult for others

to exclude based on difference (Bordo 49). In addition to wearing certain brands, NY

expressed altering her eyelids in order to make them appear more like a white eyelid, an

eyelid that has a defined crease. She said that she would put tape on her eyelid for about

ten minutes or so before taking it off. When she removed the tape, her eyelid had a

crease. This allowed her to apply makeup like the white women applied eye makeup in

the YouTube tutorials that she watched on a regular basis. Bordo states that eyelid

alteration is common amongst Asian cultures and has "become increasingly common for

job-seeking female college graduates to have their eyes surgically altered to appear more

occidental" (Bordo 49). Bordo went on to explain that altering the eyelids to appear more

westernized gives Asian women an edge in job searching (Bordo 49). As body altering

becomes normalized amongst women of color, women of color who resist complying

with the expectation to appear and attain a more white appearance may struggle to be

accepted within some groups or cultures. In addition, they may not be considered for

some opportunities or experiences based upon lack of conformity to the white ideal

woman's appearance (Bordo 49).

　　　　YN, a first year Asian American student, also described the pressures of being on

a predominately white campus. She explained that she is very self-conscious about

herself because her white peers tend to have ideal attributes that she lacks. YN stated that

white women "have the boobs, they have the butt, and…you have nothing compared to them." The desire to have more voluptuous body parts is in contrast to the thin ideal and necessity to be slender, a common presentation of women's bodies in the media. Lipkin argues that thinness is "widely held up in American culture today as an ideal to be achieved" regardless of a woman's cultural background or upbringing (Lipkin 49). This narrow representation of bodies remains "in opposition to the bodies of most real women" and images of women in the media represent the expectation to "be diminutive, shrinking, not taking up excessive space, and standing in contrast to a larger male form" (Lipkin 50). YN's description of her own body as skinny contrasts Lipkin's statements regarding the American obsession with thinness. Although YN may want to have more curves to her body, she still recognizes that being thin is more preferred than being fat or overweight in American society. YN's friends encourage her embrace her thin body and tell her that it is better to be thin than overweight, reinforcing that thin is good and fat is bad within American culture and society. YN went on to explain that she enjoys not having to exercise or diet to keep her figure thin.

Another participant stated similar remarks about insecurity on campus. PA, a first year Mexican American student, stated that her insecurities with being on a predominately white campus occurred when working out at the campus recreation center. She said that seeing skinny white women working out at the gym motivated her to want to be more like them. She compared her experience to high school. PA stated that in high school "nobody really talked about tanning and like working out…but here, a lot of girls work out and that's why I was like, oh, I need to get out and step up my game." PA went on to discuss that keeping her body fit is important for her because it helps her fit in with

her friends who maintain their bodies through exercise and dieting. Exercise and the toned body "has become a symbol of correct attitude [and] it means that one 'cares' about oneself and how one appears to others" (Bordo 195). Bordo explains that the popularity of exercise and physical activity creates an expectation for "a tighter, smoother, more contained body profile" and a body that appears to be controlled and cared for (Bordo 188). However, this controlled and cared for appearance is not based upon physical activity levels or commitment but aesthetics and presentation.

Four participants attended mostly white high schools or grew up in a predominately white hometown. HR, a first year African American student, said that going to a predominately white university does not really impact her body image because she is used to being in a predominately white culture. However, she did mention that because the majority of her family members that live near her and friends are white, she has created more white bodily expectations for herself. Similarly, DC, a first year African American woman, said that going to a predominately white university does not impact her body image. She attended mostly white schools throughout her life and does not really pay attention to what others are doing in terms of their body. Even expectations for college women do not impact her own body image. "I've just been working on myself and how I want my own body to look" DC stated. Both HR and DC described their body images as positive and neither have had negative interactions with peers of other races on campus. It is interesting that HR and DC have not had any negative interactions with peers of other races since being on campus because research by Sengupta explains that women of color attending predominately white colleges develop coping skills to deal with the vast amounts of racial tension experienced on campus (Sengupta 236).

However, I believe that the difference is that these women attended predominately white high schools. These women may have developed coping skills throughout their childhood and adolescence that prepared them for attending a predominately white university.

Relationships with friends and peers impact body image. When participants had friends and peers with positive body images, they had a more positive body image about themselves. The participants in my research stated that their body image was positive and that they felt better about their body because of their body positive friendships. In addition, they tended to encourage their friends and peers to have a more positive body image. Doherty suggests that relationships impact the way in which a woman sees herself and defines her own identity (Doherty 17). A woman's self identity and self-image is "intimately intertwined with who she is to significant people in her life" such as friends and peers (Doherty 17). Therefore, if a woman feels more positively about herself then she expects her relationships with others to foster that positivity. SD, a first year Mexican American student, explained that her close friends all had very different body types but they always encourage one another to love their body. "We never want to put each other down cause that's not friendship, its like frenemies or something" SD said. She also stated that she does not change her appearance when interacting with friends because she does not want to change for anyone. Similarly, DQ, a first year African American student, describes her friends as extremely supportive and accepting of different bodies. DQ said, "When I'm with my friends, they foster a positive body image and…we're really accepting and we help each other be positive." Having friends who are body positive and encourage you to love your own body impacts the way that you see your own body when friends are not around. Doherty argues that positive relationships create

"a sense of empowerment or 'zest' [as well as] an active interest in and responsiveness to the subjective experience of the other, [allowing] each person [to appreciate] the uniqueness of the other" (Doherty 17). Not only do positive relationships allow women to be empowered to love their own body and encourage others to love their body, but can reduce negative self-talk and body shaming amongst friends and peer groups.

When the participant had friends and peers with negative body images, they had a more negative body image about themselves. YN, a first year Asian American student, explains that her friend group mostly has negative body images and having a negative body image is a commonality amongst the group. She said that having a negative body image brings the group together and allows the group to talk about ways to motivate one another on body image issues. She went on to say that having someone positive would throw off the group dynamic. However, in certain situations, like going swimming or to parties, her friends made her feel really insecure about her body. YN said that she mostly feels insecure in these situations because she sees other women and friends with more voluptuous body parts. This makes her "feel like such a little girl with nothing." This is interesting because, within American media outlets, physically appearing like a little girl or someone that is extremely thin is desired. Bordo describes the ideal image of thinness in American culture by addressing how all of the people in a particular Calvin Klein advertisement appear to all, regardless of age, race, or gender, "have the same toned, adolescent-looking body" (Bordo 5). This advertisement does not stand alone with this imagery. Several advertisements and media sources promote the idea of having a youthful and extremely thin body. However, YN may feel that her body makes her feel like "a little girl with nothing" because she compares herself to other women of color

with more voluptuous body parts. This feeling may also be due to the black/white paradigm, which "intends to describe the fundamental nature of racializations and racisms in the United States" by categorizing race in a binary (Alcoff 248). Alcoff argues that thinking of race in terms of a black/white paradigm can leave other races, like Asian Americans or Latinos, feeling like they are excluded from both racial groups (Alcoff 248). This may cause confusion in the way one would like to appear or attributes that one should attain. This is relevant to my research because it demonstrates the confusing and conflicting messages that women of color receive about how their body should appear and how they should present their body.

When the majority of the group has a negative body image, body shaming can become regularly practiced. XS, a first year Asian American woman, described her friends as having mostly negative body images. She knows that they have negative body images because they body shame frequently, saying comments like "I'm so fat" or "I feel so fat." XS said that hearing negative comments from a friend about their own body made her question how she felt about her own body particularly about body size. In American culture, a social stigma of fatness and body size has been used "to measure one's suitability for the privileges and power of full citizenship" (Farrell 5). Friendships and social circles are included in this idea of full citizenship and often use body size as an indicator of those who belong to the group and those who do not (Farrell 5). Because fatness is stigmatized as a negative bodily quality in American culture, XS is caused to feel self-conscious when friends or peers body shame in regard to body size.

Ideals

Can you describe the ideal woman's body? This was the first question asked to all of the participants in my research. Although the answers varied slightly, the majority of the women in my research described the ideal woman as being thin but curvy, fair-skinned or Caucasian, big butt, big boobs, and long hair. The ideal body described by the participants aligned with the American female body ideal of a "slender body; flawless (and more often than not white) skin; delicate, even facial features, enhanced by makeup, [and] carefully coifed hair" (Lipkin 41). This ideal, portrayed within current and historical media, is "absorbed and 'normalized' by women within the United States (Lipkin 41). Not only does Westernized media sources within the United States describe this American female body as ideal but encourages "physical 'standards' for girls and women [including] that thinness is attractive, that clear skin and certain kinds of Caucasian features are beautiful," amongst others (Lipkin 41). The American female body ideal can become internalized and women can identify the deficits of their own body. This was true of the participants in my research, as none thought of their body as ideal. This was interesting because even when participants attained a positive body image or were extremely confident in their body, they did not see their body as fitting the ideal. The difference between the two, participants with negative body images versus participants with positive body images, was the way in which the description was given.

YN, a first year Asian American woman with a negative body image, stated, "I feel like I'm like not even close to ideal…and there's nothing I can do about it." YN has internalized the expectations of femininity norms and hegemonic beauty ideals and is unable to remove herself from them. Bartky states that the internalization process occurs

when societal beauty and body ideals "get incorporated into the structure of the self," making it difficult or impossible to remove those ideas (Bartky 114). DQ, a first year African American woman with a positive body image, stated, "I see my own body as flawed but I wouldn't say that there is one thing that I would absolutely change about my body…it's not perfect, but it's mine and I like it." Although this woman, and other women with positive body images, may identify an ideal body, she still remains confident in her own body. For her, there is a difference between the ideal woman's body and her own but there is no need to change it because the attainment of the ideal woman's body is not internalized.

Ideas surrounding thinness are complex. The majority of the participants described the ideal woman as being thin but curvy. Thinness was often described as an ideal feature and one that should be attained and maintained by women regardless of racial identity. Thinness "is widely held up in American culture today as an ideal to be achieved" (Lipkin 49). Certain cultures, including Latina and African American, may consider "a fuller, larger frame [body]…as positive" (Lipkin 49). Within my research, women who identified as Mexican American or African American explained that their culture and/or family discouraged them from being too thin and/or dieting to attain a figure that has no curves. However, "no matter what a [woman's] cultural background [may be], what is seen within American society at large is a narrow standard that's often in direct opposition to the bodies of most real women" (Lipkin 50). Due to conflicting messages about body size and appearance, women of color may feel conflicted about how their body should appear.

Although media outlets and American culture encourage women to remain thin

and to achieve a thin body, Sheldon argues that college "women learn from their friends that thinness is desirable" (Sheldon 282). Sheldon goes on to say that while the "pressure to be thin can be explicitly communicated…it can also be inferred, regardless of its actual existence" (Sheldon 282). Pressures regarding thinness from peers and friends can impact how a woman feels about her body. Two women within my research expressed having negative body images as well as body negative peers and friends. The two women with negative body images also explained that their friends and peers were more likely to body shame and compare their bodies to others, which is more common amongst groups of women "displaying higher levels of body-image concerns" (Sheldon 283).

For the two women with negative body images, being thin is not enough to build confidence in body image. The women with negative body images said that others describe their body as skinny and compliment them on their thinness regularly. However, they question what other people define as skinny and point out areas of fat on their body. XS, a first year Asian American woman, stated, "I'm not exactly perfectly slim or if I wear tight clothes, it's not like perfect curves." XS does not see her own body as matching up to the ideal or meeting the level of thinness that she desires, even when others tell her that she is skinny, because of her current living situation and routine. She described her current lifestyle, as a college student, as less active, more sedentary, and more indulgent in unhealthy foods. XS went on to say that her current lifestyle has caused her to gain weight, especially around the stomach area, and feel fat. In the United States culture, "fatness…[often] 'means' excess of desire, of bodily urges not controlled, of immoral, lazy, and sinful habits" (Farrell 10). This definition of fatness creates a good/bad dichotomy for bodies. Associations with a fat body are often negative,

stigmatizing a person's physical appearance as well as a person's character (Farrell 6).

When one believes that they are fat in any capacity, it is possible that they begin to body

shame their own body and associate their body with cultural definitions of fatness such as

being lazy or unable to control the body.

Although two women expressed negative body images and aligned with

mainstream research regarding bodily esteem amongst young women, eight women in my

research expressed having a positive body image as well as positive peer and friend

groups. These women discussed maintaining a healthy lifestyle and a thin body in healthy

ways like eating healthy foods and exercising. The women also mentioned exercising in

moderation and not taking any diet or weight loss strategy to an extreme. Their attitudes

toward their own body and physical activity allow me to conclude that they have a

positive physical self-concept, which can be defined as a positive attitude "towards

physical fitness, endurance, strength, coordination, flexibility, agility, overall appearance,

general health, and/[or] athletic competence" (Snapp 213). Having a positive physical

self-concept can act as a "protective factor against body dissatisfaction" (Snapp 231). In

addition, having a physical self-concept may improve overall health and self-esteem. The

eight women in my research may have a more positive body image because of their

positive physical self-concept and attitude toward overall health and wellness.

The participants with positive body images also described experiences of others

stating that their body was slim or thin. However, they often did not take this in a

negative way. RG, a first year Mexican American woman, described a situation where

other people were making negative comments to her about her slim, athletic body, stating

that she was anorexic. Anorexia nervosa can be defined as "an eating disorder

characterized by a fear of becoming fat, a distorted body image, and excessive dieting leading to emaciation" (Seely 122). Disordered eating, including anorexia nervosa and bulimia, is considered a serious medical condition affecting an estimate "between 4 and 20 percent of college-age women" (Seely 123). Accusing an acquaintance of being anorexic or having an eating disorder is a serious claim and one that is difficult to defend. RG assumed that the person who made the comment regarding her appearance was trying to get her mad and upset about the accusation. However, RG brushed the comments off, stating, "I know I'm not so those comments just don't bother me...I just move on." The confidence that she has in her body allows her to think past the negativity and ignore comments that may be hurtful to someone else. If someone in this situation has a negative body image and lack of confidence in their own body, the comment may make them feel more insecure about their body and hurt by the statement.

Regardless of their body image, all of the women described a part of their body, sometimes multiple parts, that they would change or alter. Some mentioned alterations that could happen naturally like slimming the stomach while others mentioned alterations difficult or impossible to achieve like reducing foot size. Interestingly, none of the women expressed interest in wanting to go through with altering their body through extreme measures even if it was a possibility to do so. This is interesting because American media is infiltrated with advertisements and promotions for perfection through various methods including extreme dieting, plastic surgery, gastric bypass surgery, and other methods to reaching an unattainable beauty standard (Seely 130). While none of the women discussed finances as a deterrent of getting bodily alterations, some did discuss cultural values and opinions of others, such as friends and family members,

discouraging alterations through plastic surgery, extreme dieting, or other methods. However, the way in which the participant answered the question differed. For the participants who had a negative body image, there was a lengthy list of alterations to be made to her body. YN stated that she would like to change her boobs, butt, and to be like a Victoria Secret model because, to her, that is the ideal. She went on to say that some "people are just born with all that stuff and I'm born with pretty much nothing." YN could not find anything about her body that she liked nor could she limit her alterations to just one specific body part. Eight women who disclosed having positive body images tended to have difficulty answering the question, adding phrases like "I don't know" or long pauses indicating thinking. Even though the majority did disclose potential alterations, phrases like "I don't know" and extended periods of thinking allow me to conclude that they were unsure of potential alterations and more confident in the body parts that they currently attain.

Norms

Race impacts the way one feels about the body. Racial stereotypes are often in relation to the dominate white patriarchal society and often a source of racism, which can be defined as "a negative value or set of values projected as an essential attribute onto a group whose members are defined through genealogical connection…and demarcated on the basis of some visible features" (Alcoff 259). Although the women participating in my research did not mention racism in relation to the body, several participants discussed how stereotypes and expectations of their race impacted the way they felt about their own body as well as specific body parts. Asian women discussed how height stereotypes

impacted their body image while African American and Mexican American women discussed how specific parts of their body, like their butt and boobs, were expected to be more voluptuous because they were African American or Mexican American. YN, a first year Asian American woman, discussed the prevalence of stereotypes referencing thinness of Asian women, stating that Asian women "don't have anything and I feel like I'm just one in that category." YN does not see her uniqueness as an individual and categorizes herself as someone who is just fitting the stereotype.

DQ, a first year African American woman, expressed feeling defined by a specific part of her body because of her race. She stated, "I feel like people expect me to be like super voluptuous…I'm just supposed to be big in like every aspect of the word." She went on to say that while she would not dismiss those features, she does not want them to define her. Bordo explains that "racial… 'Others' might find themselves to be more, not less, susceptible to the power of cultural imagery" (Bordo 135). She went on to say that "the distribution of weight" in the lower half of the body, similar to the voluptuousness DQ describes as an expectation of being an African American woman, was "associated with feelings not of being too fat but of being 'too much'" (Bordo 135). This idea of voluptuousness and largeness amongst African Americans is built upon racist stereotypes created in the wake of European colonization in Africa, which is explored more closely in other chapters.

Culture also impacts body image. As I discussed in an earlier chapter, the role of food and culture was a theme that came out of the interviews, but was not one I specifically asked about. Several of the participants discussed how cultural foods played a role in their body image and body appearance. PA, a Mexican American woman,

discussed how she felt when she went home for visits and had to indulge or reject her cultural foods prepared by her family. She discussed how this was a sensitive topic in her household because food played an important role and eating the food was a sign of respect. If she did not eat the food, she may offend her family, but if she did, she said she might feel bad about herself because the food can sometimes be prepared in a way that is less healthy than other options. She also stated that the cultural food attributed to weight gain. XS, a first year Asian American woman, expressed similar concerns with weight gain and cultural foods. In her Asian culture, XS eats a lot of jasmine rice with family and friends. She said that she recently heard that people on diets do not eat rice or only eat brown rice. XS believes that eating rice consistently has caused her to have more weight than others who do not eat the same cultural foods regularly. Other participants voiced similar concerns with cultural foods and weight gain. The participants that discussed cultural foods impacting body image described food in a way that left them with a decision to either eat the cultural food and gain weight or reject the cultural food and be thin.

Participants received messages about their hair from mothers, sisters, relatives, and peers. Hair is a big deal, especially according to the cultures of the participants. Asian women explained how their hair should be kept long and black. Cutting the hair was described as less desirable or even disobedient of parents' wishes. Mexican American women also described hair expectations as being long and black. Dying the hair was discouraged because it was disrespectful to the Mexican culture or described as dangerous to the hair's health and sustainability. African American women had varied responses to how their hair should be kept. Some used techniques like chemically

straightening the hair, some had extensions or weaves put in their hair, and some had left their hair natural. Some experimented with all of these hair styling options. Many of the participants had a lot to say about their hair and interactions with others regarding their hair, as I discuss below. Not only did they learn how they should wear their hair and take care of their hair, but techniques or styles that they should avoid doing to their hair.

For example, DQ, a first year African American woman, received information from her mother and peers. Her mother was not thrilled when she cut her hair short to grow her hair naturally. DQ's mother told her that "hair makes a woman and you need to maintain your hair because it basically defines…how you're perceived as beautiful." DQ struggled with this message because she thought that she was just as beautiful with short, natural hair as she was with longer, chemically straightened hair. She said, "I believe I can be beautiful no matter what my hair looks like." She also explained that natural hair is a source of contention amongst African American women because there is pressure to style the hair in a more white fashion. DQ believe that there is nothing wrong with conforming to these norms and straightening the hair, but personally wants to appreciate how it grows naturally. In addition to her mother's resistance, DQ experienced negative comments from peers in high school and college about her new hairstyle. The high school friends had more of an opinion regarding her short hair because she cut her hair prior to coming to college. However, once the semester started she added extensions to her hair. One college friend was very vocal about her styling her hair long and wavy. When DQ got curly extensions, the college friend said that he did not like the hairstyle and that it looked unnatural. This caused an argument between the two about the new hairstyle. Once again, DQ had to stand up for herself and defend the choices she made for her

hairstyle. Because of her confidence and positive body image, she was able to confront these opinions in a way that kept her feeling positive about her hair and her choices with her body. DQ challenged the way others think about what is acceptable or expected for African American women's hair and what is not. Other women with positive body images also challenged the notions of hair care advice from parents and peers.

Participants with negative body images agreed with the opinions of others regarding hair. XS, a first year Asian American woman, has had short hair and long hair throughout her life. She explained that her sister thought longer hair makes a woman prettier. Since hearing that comment, she agreed with her sister because she felt she looks better with longer hair versus shorter hair. XS said that having longer hair adds to her appearance in a way that shorter hair does not. YN's experience was similar to XS. YN, a first year Asian American woman, was taught that her hair should be long, beautiful, and black. Long hair "means you're a good daughter [and that] you listen to your parents" YN explained. Cutting your hair short was considered a bad thing, but dying your hair deemed you "automatically a slut or something along those lines." She learned these hair norms from her older sister who lived out her parent's wishes of having long, black hair. YN's sister's behavior and messages influenced her to look up to her and her appearance. The women with negative body images were more inclined to take the advice of family members or peers in regards to their hair and appearance. This is an interesting finding within my research because there is limited discussion surrounding the cultural and societal expectations of hair care, maintenance, and styling for Asian American and Mexican American women.

Resistance to Mainstream Body Norms

When peers and friends embrace you for you, it makes it easier for one to accept the self. All of the participants said that their peers and friends told them to embrace their body and who they are. Even if the peers and friends were mostly negative about their own body, they still encouraged the participant to embrace her own body. Participants expressed that this made them feel positively about their body and accepted by their friends and peers. HR said that being surrounded by positive friends helps her own self-image because "when you see other people confident and happy the way they are, it makes you feel the same." Doherty argues that, for women, "connections with others [are] fundamental to one's experience of oneself as a living being" and plays a vital role in how women characterize the self (Doherty 17). Friendships that are "mutually supportive [and] empowering…may serve as anchoring relationships, like a touchstone for staying in touch with oneself" and cushion stressors that arise (Doherty 24). In addition, healthy friendships and relationships allow women to empower one another to feel positively and embrace their body. I believe that it is important for women to have stable, healthy relationships in college because it can foster a desire for success in academics, student involvement, and long-term goals.

Although all participants had friends that accepted their body, one participant had friends that accepted her regardless of body appearance while other friends told her to alter her body. DQ, a first year African American woman, explained that some of her friends would encourage her to go on a diet, work out at the gym, lose weight, or more healthily. The friends that told her to alter or change her body often got neglected. DQ said that she chose to "listen to the friends that encourage the me being me thing" and

ignore the negative comments because weight is not something that she fears. She went on to say that she wishes "people felt better about themselves cause if you ask someone…to list things you love…the last thing someone would say would be their body. Most people wouldn't even mention it." For this reason, DQ said she tries to stand in front of the mirror everyday and telling herself that she is beautiful and her flaws are okay.

The participants with positive body images expressed that they present their body for their own desires. The participants also stated that they would not change for someone else or adapt their body to the standards of others, even if there was pressure to do so. The women stated that they felt extremely confident and comfortable in their appearance, which may lead them to think that their bodily presentation is solely their own and not based upon what others think or societal beliefs. However, the appearance and maintenance of women's bodies is often based upon cultural expectations of femininity. Bodies have shaped and evolved as a product of culture because "culture predetermines who we are, how we behave, what we are willing to know, [and] what we are willing to feel," (Dworkin 34). Bodily appearance and presentation standards for women are influenced by the consumption of media, interactions and relationships with others, and the beauty norms perpetually idealized within American culture (Bordo xxviii). Bordo critiques an episode of *Maury* in which young teenage "tomboys" are transformed to look "girly" (Bordo xxviii). The young teenagers were dressing in a way that they enjoyed at first, but were then made to appear more "normal" in fashionable clothing, makeup, and hairstyles. Upon completion of the new appearance, the women stated that they would continue to keep up with their new style and dismiss the tomboy choice (Bordo xxviii).

This example that Bordo addresses helps demonstrate that the feelings and thoughts of others can manipulate appearance-related decisions and decisions regarding our bodily appearance are always, in some way, influenced by the thoughts and actions of others. Therefore, the women in my research who claim to be presenting their body for themselves are ultimately influenced by cultural expectations of body appearance and presentation. Even though cultural expectations of women's bodies influences bodily presentation, the women with positive body images in my research genuinely thought of their body as their own and believed to be presenting their body for themselves. When women believe to be presenting their body for themselves, they have more confidence in their body and defend their choices for their body.

RG, a first year Mexican American woman, discussed knowing others who have altered their body for the sake of others. She said that those who did not choose to change their body for their own desires had difficulty meeting goals bodily goals and felt worse about their body overall. RG went on to say that she would not alter her body for others because of the experiences of others she has known. RG said, "I've learned that you have to change for yourself and not for anybody else under any circumstances." Although she remains confident and comfortable in her body, she said that if she did have to change something about her body, it would always be for herself, never for others. DC, a first year African American woman, also said that she presents her body for herself and makes her body appear in a way that makes her feel pretty. She is not trying to be attractive to others or attempt to make herself look a certain way that others might like or find pretty. However, DC's definition of pretty may be based upon cultural definitions of the word and, therefore, influenced by cultural ideals and beliefs. DC said, "I do everything on

myself for myself" because she does not want to be depressed about her body image and question what she could change about her body. In addition, making herself feel good based upon her own desires has boosted her confidence and increased her self-esteem. Vaccaro suggests that when women have a positive "self-esteem and sense of empowerment," other areas of their life are often affected (Vaccaro 115). Self-investment, "the valuing of oneself enough to believe that personal growth, learning and development is not merely needed but deserved," can be a result of positive self-esteem and feelings about the self (Vaccarro 114). Because self-investment is specific to education, it is important that professionals and faculty in University settings encourage women of color to be confident in all facets of life, including body image, because the way one feels about the self impacts performance in the classroom.

One participant stated that she once had a negative interaction with someone regarding her hairstyle. Before coming to college, DQ, a first year African American woman, cut her hair short to have natural hair. She cut her hair because she "wanted to learn to love it and learn to handle it and learn how to accept it and like it." She cut her hair because she wanted to, not because others wanted her to do so. However, one Caucasian friend told her that other men would not like her hair short and that she should style it a different way. DQ challenged this person's remark by asking why they thought they represented the opinion of all men and that their argument was stupid. DQ's ability to challenge peers of another race at a predominately white undergraduate institution differs from the experience of other women of color attending predominately white undergraduate universities (Sengupta 236). Sengupta explains that women of color "develop coping skills to deal with the stress from 'racial tension and conflict within their

campus environment' [and] are most likely…to cope by avoiding tensions instead of addressing them" (Sengupta 236). DQ presents her body for herself because it gives her the choice and control over what she wants to do with her body. DQ has a positive body image and is not afraid to stand up to others in defense of her body. Someone with a negative body image in this situation may doubt the decision to cut the hair or react to the negative friend differently. This shows us that when college women of color have positive body images, they are more prepared to defend their choices and ownership of their bodily decisions.

Oftentimes, women are trained to hate their bodies and alter their body for the sake of acceptance. The participants with negative body images expressed that their body presentation was solely for other people and what other people would think. YN said that she presents her body for others because she does not feel good about her own body. She said, "I would dress a certain way to be with certain people so I can kinda fit in." Outward appearance allows YN to feel accepted within a particular group. Wearing certain clothes and manipulating the body, like wearing makeup or styling the hair, is common to fit in with particular groups of people. Messages about how a woman's body should appear comes from media outlets and peer groups, which influence women to present their bodies in ways that allow for acceptance and likeability. However, the women with negative body images expressed presenting their body based upon what other people thought about their body, which may cause them to feel lack of authenticity. In addition, they may lack confidence in displaying their body in public and develop bodily dissatisfaction or disordered eating. This shows us that when college women of color have negative body images and friends with negative body images, they may lack

self-confidence and present their body solely based upon the opinions of others instead of their own likes and dislikes.

Conclusion

Women who described their friendships and peer groups as being positive about body image had a positive body image of their own. They felt extremely secure in their body and confident in their appearance. Not only did they feel good about their body but outwardly challenged those who felt their body was imperfect. They were able to challenge Western beauty norms because of their self-assurance and confidence. In addition, the women with positive body images presented their body for themselves and relied on their own likes and dislikes when deciding how to style their hair or what clothing to wear.

Women who described their friendships and peer groups as being negative about body image had a negative body image of their own. Not only did they feel that their body did not match up to what they believed to be the ideal woman's body but that their body could never be seen as accepted. The women with negative body images have internalized hegemonic beauty ideals and what is believed to be beautiful in American culture. They present their bodies for others and alter their appearance to fit in with friends. In addition, they attempt to emulate the body image and appearance of white peers at a predominately white university. These women explained that they have low self-esteem and shameful feelings toward their body because of their negative body image. As a result, the women with negative body images tend to experience more instances of body shaming and insecurity. They also lack confidence in their body and appearance.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates the complex relationship women of color have with their body and the unique body challenges women of color face in their first year of college at a predominately white undergraduate institution. I argue that peers and friendships play a major role in the body image of women of color. Women of color with peers and friendships with positive body images also have positive body images of their own. Similarly, women of color with peers and friendships with negative body images also have negative body images of their own. Peers and friends of women of color influence the way women of color see their own body, encourage healthy or unhealthy body expectations, foster positive or negative feelings about the body, and compliment or reject the body. Eight women in my research described having a positive body image and having relationships with peers or friends who have the same ideas about their bodies. Having other women who embrace different body types, encourage positive self-talk, refer to the body in a positive way, and make others feel comfortable with their body when interacting together can build self-esteem, foster a healthy relationship with the body, and feel accepted. Of the ten participants, only two women expressed having negative body images. These two women in my research also described having a peers or friends who feel negatively about their own body. The women with negative body images said that their peers and friends regularly body shame, complain about their body, and internalize the ideal woman's body.

One's environment can play a major role in the construction and transformation of body image. The women in my research have experienced drastic changes in environment within the past six months. For many of these women, college was a new

experience filled with new academic, social, living, and personal challenges. As a woman of color, gender and racial challenges might have added to the complexity of this transition from high school to college. For four of the women in my research, attending school with mostly white peers was a new experience. These women expressed more of the racial tensions felt on campus as well as their expectation to match the appearance of their white peers. However, none of the four women expressed having negative interactions with peers of other races since coming to campus. This is interesting because research suggests that women of color often need to develop coping strategies to deal with the racial conflicts (Sengupta 235). Four participants attended mostly white high schools or grew up in predominately white hometowns. For these participants, racial tensions were not recognized and the expectations for white college women do not influence their own bodily desires. It is interesting to understand the varied experiences of women of color attending a predominately white undergraduate institution because the environment can be new or familiar, which can influence how one feels about the self and body.

The women's own insight about their body image in relation to their definition of the ideal woman's body allowed me to conclude that women of color face additional challenges when attending college at a predominately white undergraduate institution. My research focused on how age, gender and race impacted the definition of the ideal woman's body by women of color as well as the feelings that women of color have toward their own body. Future studies could address additional identity factors including, but not limited to, class and sexual orientation. Adding additional demographic information and identity factors could allow for an intersectional analysis. Although

there were varied definitions, the majority of the women in my research described the ideal woman's body as being thin but curvy, fair-skinned or Caucasian, big butt, big boobs, and long hair. This definition aligns with the American female body ideal presented within United States media and normalized within Western United States culture (Lipkin 41). In addition to the media, the women of color within my research learned about body ideals and expectations of their body from cultural norms, family members, and friends and peers. Norms and body ideals regarding race, size, presentation, and appearance directly impacted whether a woman felt positive or negative about her own body. Women with positive body images challenged mainstream norms of body shaming and negative self-talk by embracing their body and displaying outward notions of confidence. Not only did the women individually embrace their body, but had friends and peer groups that embraced all body types and contributed to their confidence.

Gaining insight on how first year women of color studying at a predominately white school feel about their body and how their peer groups and friendships impact their body image allowed me to self-reflect on my own body image. It challenged me to reflect on my relationship with my own body as well as how others in my life impact my body image. This research brought up good and bad memories regarding my body, which provided me with an opportunity to confront internalized body image issues and work towards having a more positive body image of my own body. I confronted these internalized body image issues by starting a daily "I Love My Body" journal which solely focused on why I love my body and positive remarks towards my body. This journal helped me recognize that I should love my body and that there are more important things to be focused on than the physical appearance of my own body. However, my journaling

and self-reflection led to additional questions and brainstorming, which can only be answered or fulfilled through more research or programming.

As I continue to learn about body image and the impact of homosocial relationships on body image, I uncover more questions to be researched and more projects to implement on college campuses. Questions to be researched include: How do second, third, and fourth year women of color studying at predominately white undergraduate institutions feel about their body image? How do romantic relationships impact the body image of collegiate women? How does the media impact the body image of collegiate women? How do familial relationships, specifically with the mother, impact the body image of collegiate women? How does sexual orientation impact the body image of women of color? How does being a first generation college student impact the body image of collegiate women? How does the body image of collegiate women transform from first year to senior year? These are all questions that could potentially uncover more information regarding body image and the experiences of collegiate women.

Programming on college campuses is essential to empowering women to have positive body images and encouraging friends and peers to feel good about their body. Because of my research results, I believe that programming needs to target first year women living within residence hall communities. It is important to actively promote and engage students in body image programming within the residence halls because the majority of first year students live and interact with friends in this space. I believe that this can provide a platform for talking about body image issues and confronting challenges regarding body image. In addition, this can allow student programming and

initiatives to develop organically. Displaying positive body images of women of color in areas of the campus, including campus common areas and campus classrooms, could be implemented to support women of color on campus. I believe that acting upon this research is important because activism and campus programming can help collegiate women better understand their body image, improve the way they feel about their body, encourage their friends and peers to embrace different body types, and boost overall confidence. Not only can this boost overall confidence and self-esteem for women of color studying at Minnesota State University Mankato, but encourage women of color to attain academic success and be involved in the campus and greater Mankato community.

Bibliography

Alcoff, Linda. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. New York: Oxford UP,
    2006. Print.

Bartky, Susan. "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power."
    Feminist Philosophies: Problems, Theories, and Applications. Englewood Cliffs,
    NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992. Print.

Belenky, Mary Field., Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill
Mattuck
    Tarule. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*.
    New York: Basic, 1986. Print.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*.
    Berkeley: University of California, 1993, 2003. Print.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the
Politics of*
    Empowerment. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Davis, Kathy. *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*. London: Sage,
    1997. Print.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952. Print.

Doherty, Patricia A., and Ellen Piel Cook. "No Woman Is an Island: Women and
    Relationships." *Women, Relationships, and Power: Implications for Counseling*.
    Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association, 1993. Print.

Dworkin, Andrea. *Woman Hating*. New York: Dutton, 1974. Print.

Farrell, Amy Erdman. *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*. New
York,
    NY: New York UP, 2011. Print.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene. "Feminist Approaches to In-Depth Interviewing." *Feminist
    Research Practice: A Primer*. Ed. Sharlene Nagy. Hesse-Biber. Thousand Oaks:
    SAGE Publications, 2014. 182-232. Print.

Hobson, Janell. *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture*. New
    York: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Jaggar, Alison M. *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader*. Boulder, CO:

Paradigm, 2008. Print.

Josselson, Ruthellen. *Finding Herself: Pathways to Identity Development in Women*.
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987. Print.

Lipkin, Elline. *Girls' Studies*. Berkeley, CA: Seal, 2009. Print.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing,
1984. Print.

"Minnesota State University, Mankato." *Fast Facts – About the University – About the
University –*. N.p., n.d. Web. Feb.-Mar. 2014.

"What Is Body Image? | National Eating Disorders Association." *What Is Body Image? |
National Eating Disorders Association*. NEDA, n.d. Web. Feb.-Mar. 2014.

Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" *Feminist Theory: A
Reader*. By Frances Bartkowski and Wendy K. Kolmar. Boston: McGraw-Hill
Higher Education, 2010. 201-10. Print.

Robinson, John P., Phillip R. Shaver, and Lawrence S. Wrightsman. *Measures of
Personality
and Social Psychological Attitudes*. San Diego: Academic, 1991. Print.

Seely, Megan. *Fight like a Girl: How to Be a Fearless Feminist*. New York: New York
UP,
2007. Print.

Sengupta, Amy Stalzer, and Yvette Loury Upton. "Identity Development in College
Women."
*Empowering Women in Higher Education and Student Affairs: Theory, Research,
Narratives, and Practice from Feminist Perspectives*. By Penny A. Pasque and
Shelley
Errington. Nicholson. Sterling, VA: Stylus Pub., 2011. 231-45. Print.

Sheldon, Pavica. "Pressure To Be Perfect: Influences on College Students' Body
Esteem."
Southern Communications Journal 75.3 (2010): 277-98. Print.

Snapp, Shannon, Laura Hensley-Choate, and Ehri Ryu. "A Body Image Resilience Model
for First-Year College Women." *Sex Roles* 67.3-4 (2012): 211-21. Print.

Vaccaro, Annemarie. "Toward Self Investment: Using Feminist and Critical Race

Lenses to Analyze Motivation, Self-Esteem, and Empowerment of Women's College

      Students." *Empowering Women in Higher Education and Student Affairs: Theory,*

      Research, Narratives, and Practice from Feminist Perspectives. Ed. Penny A.

      Pasque and Shelley Errington Nicholson. Sterling, VA: Stylus Pub., 2011. Print.

Weinshenker, Naomi. "Adolescents and Body Image: What's Typical and

      What's Not." *Child Study Center* 6.4 (2002)

Appendix A: Demographics

Initials	*Age*	*Race*	*Year in College*	*Major*
DQ	18	African American	First Year	Communication Studies and Gender and Women's Studies
DC	18	African American	First Year	Undecided
YN	19	Asian	First Year	Undecided
XS	18	Asian	First Year	Undecided
RG	19	Mexican American	First Year	Sociology
SD	18	African American	First Year	Psychology
NY	18	Asian / Hmong	First Year	Social Work
HR	19	African American	First Year	Criminal Psychology
PA	20	Mexican American	First Year	Mass Media
VL	19	Asian / Filipino	First Year	Clinical Lab Science

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Body and Body Image

1. Can you describe the ideal woman's body?
2. Can you describe how you see your own body?
3. Can you describe how others might see your body?
4. Describe your body image
5. Describe what has been the biggest impact on your body image
6. Can you talk about parts of your body that you would like to alter?
7. Can you think of a time when someone complimented you on your body and how that made you feel?
8. Can you think of a time when someone rejected your body and how that made you feel?
9. If you could describe your body in three words, what would they be?
10. Can you explain how your body image has changed since being on campus?

Race and Body Image

1. Can you explain to me how you think your race impacts your body image?
2. Can you describe how body images of your race are represented in the media?
3. Can you explain how going to a predominately white school impacts your body image?
4. Can you explain how your culture influences your body image?
5. Can you explain what your mother, sister, or relatives told you about hair, body, and/or skin care as it relates to your race?
6. Can you explain what your peers told you about hair, body, and/or skin care as it relates to your race?
7. Can you describe a time when you have had a negative interaction with someone of another race about body or hair since coming to college?

Interpersonal Relationships and Body Image

1. Can you tell me a little about your close friendships and how those relationships might impact your body image?

2. Can you tell me how you might change your appearance when hanging out with different groups of friends?

3. Can you tell me how you feel about your body when hanging out with friends? *Has this changed since being on campus?

4. Do you present your body for yourself or for others?

5. Do your friends/peer groups encourage you to embrace your body as is or do they encourage you to alter it?

Appendix C: Consent Form

IRB Case Number 532687-3
Consent for Participation

This research project will study the body image of first year undergraduate women of color studying at Minnesota State University-Mankato.

Purpose
The purpose of this research is to understand how peer groups and friendship relationships affect the body image of women of color in their first year of college.

Participation
Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship to Minnesota State University, Mankato, nor will a refusal to participate involve a penalty or loss of benefits. This study is voluntary and you can end participation at any time.

Time Commitment
As a participant, you will participate in a 45-60 minute, audio recorded interview about your body image.

Benefits
By participating in this research, you will contribute to knowledge about women of color and body image.

Risks
We do not anticipate any risks to you participating other than those encountered in daily life. However, some participants may experience anxiety from exposing personal experiences.

Confidentiality
Participant information shared within this interview will be kept confidential by not using any identifiers within any public or published documents. All consent forms will be stored in Morris Hall 109 for three years from the end date of research. After three years, all forms and information will be destroyed.

Audio Recording
Your interview will be audio recorded and stored on a password protected, encrypted computer for three years from the end date of research. After three years, these recordings will be destroyed.

Participant Rights and Research-Related Injuries
For information about your rights as a participant and/or research-related injuries, please contact the Graduate Dean at:

Barry J. Ries, PhD
115 Alumni Foundation Center
507-389-2321

barry.ries@mnsu.edu

Researcher(s) Contact Information
For additional information or questions about the research study, please contact the
Principal Investigator or Student Investigator at:

Jocelyn Stitt   Lauren Kross
Morris 109   Morris 109
952-426-5313   507-389-5498
Jocelyn.stitt@mnsu.edu   lauren.kross@mnsu.edu

By signing below, you consent to participating in the research project and have read the
above information. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

I _____ consent to participating in this research study.

_____
             _____
Signature   Date

**This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the
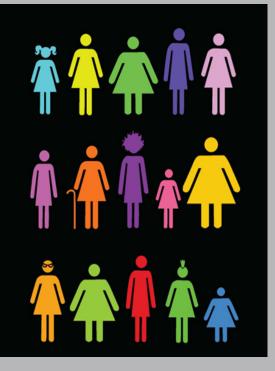end of the study and was approved by the IRB on (insert date here once approved).**

Name	
Age	
Race	
Year at Minnesota State University Mankato	
Major	
How did you hear about this interview?	

81

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer