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# Moved to Move: Socially Contextualizing Women's Exercise Motivations

Dusti Rae Werner

*Minnesota State University - Mankato*

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# Moved to Move:

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Socially Contextualizing Women's Exercise Choices

**Dusti Werner**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Sociology

College Teaching Emphasis

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

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**Abstract**

Moved to Move: Socially Contextualizing Women's Exercise Choices

Dusti Werner

Master of Arts in Sociology

Minnesota State University, Mankato

2014

Using qualitative data from 11 interviews with women who exercise regularly, this research explores women's motivations to exercise, how they make social comparisons and how they self-evaluate their bodies through the social context of gender, socio-economic status and race. Women with intrinsic motivations to exercise find more positive, long term outcomes than those with extrinsic motivations. Women compare themselves to similar others, such as their peers to form self-evaluations more readily than they do media images. Respondents also indicated the importance of relationships in beginning and maintaining exercise regimes.

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Throughout the past five decades in America, there has been an increasing emphasis within American society on health and fitness (Tiggemann & Williamson 2000), especially pertaining to the fitness of women. The Western cultural concept of an ideal body for a woman today is in reality unobtainable. The images of exceptionally thin women in the media have constructed a new thinness standard that is internalized by many women, but nearly impossible to meet (Wasilenko et. al. 2007). The sociocultural factors in present day America, such as media or peer pressures lead women to focus on their weight, appearance and shape (Gillen & Lefkowitz 2006). Women are constantly bombarded with images of thin celebrities on magazine covers, on the internet, and in movies and television shows. The focus on a stick thin figure being the most desirable body type leaves many women feeling less than satisfied with their own bodies that do not meet the unrealistic standards of beauty in American culture. Women may also opt to reframe the concept of an ideal body and embrace their less than ideal selves (Edgley 2006), such as seen in the Dove's campaign for real beauty, where women of all shapes, sizes, colors and ages model in their underwear embracing their body advertising Dove soap products.

Social comparison theory provides a helpful lens with which to analyze the ways women are influenced by media images. The theory assumes that individuals evaluate themselves based on how they compare to certain others (Festinger 1954). Using this approach, we could theorize that women who compare themselves to others who more closely approximate the thin ideal body type are more likely to experience decreased self-regard, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorders (Wasilenko et. al. 2007). Some research

frames this process in ways that assume media images are the only options for women's comparisons when conducting self-evaluations. Lin and Kulik, (2002) however, find that women compare themselves to similar others, such as peers, more frequently than they compare themselves to media celebrities. They find that many women are aware of media manipulation of digital images that make celebrities appear flawless, and thus discredit the validity of such images. According to several recent studies, comparing oneself to peers results in body image goals that are more attainable as compared to the falsely flawless celebrity images (Wasilenko et. al. 2007; Lin & Kulik 2002; Kronen et.al. 2005).

There are multiple avenues available today to work toward achieving one's ideal look, such as diet, exercise or surgery. This thesis project focuses primarily on women's participation in exercise and fitness. Until recent decades, the world of physical fitness and gyms evoked images of male bodybuilders and athletes. More currently, women's fitness has become a mainstream practice leading to more women in the gym as well as the development of all female work out facilities such as *Curves*. Much of the literature explaining women's fitness-related behaviors focuses on body image and self-esteem issues which stem from media pressures (Gillen & Lefkowitz 2006). Literature reviewed suggests that exercise that results from extrinsic motivations, such as appearance, have negative, short-term outcomes on women's overall well-being, while exercise resulting from intrinsic motivations, such as health, have positive and long-term outcomes. Interestingly, some women start out exercising to improve their appearance (extrinsic motivation), but over time, after experiencing some of the positive effects on their overall

health and wellness, develop a more intrinsically motivated approach to their exercise regimens (McDonald & Thompson 1992; Tiggeman & Williamson 2000).

Understanding whether a woman's decision to exercise is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, and the degree to which it changes over time, may help to explain the meaning they apply to their exercise endeavors and the degree to which their exercise patterns become part of their everyday lives in the long term. Social structures, such as gender, race, and class certainly shape women's lives in ways that provide them with differing perspectives on nutrition, fitness, body image, and health.

The goal of this study is to investigate the varying ways that women incorporate exercise into their daily lives and the ways that those decisions are influenced by their self comparisons, their social position, and the elements of their social environments. To do this I have conducted a qualitative study using 11 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women between the ages of 18-27. The women who participated in the study were those who have exercised regularly (3-6 days per week) for a time period of at least three consecutive months within the past year. This study uses gender as a lens to examine 1) the reasons that women begin exercising regularly with an emphasis on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations, 2) what motivates some women to *continue* exercising regularly 3) the ways in which exercise influences women's self-evaluations, 4) to whom they compare themselves when constructing such evaluations, 5) the relevance of these evaluations in making decisions regarding exercise, and finally 6) the ways in which social structural conditions (financial situation, parenting responsibilities, student responsibilities, etc.) constrain and/or enable decisions regarding exercise.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Motivations to Exercise*

Individual motivations for working out can be very diverse. Studies have found that most women are motivated to exercise due to weight control, tone and to enhance attractiveness (McDonald & Thompson 1992; Tiggeman & Williamson 2000). These studies suggest that men, on the other hand, typically exercise for health and fitness, (excluding many who self-categorize as gay) though reasons for both men and women to exercise have increasingly been associated with concerns about appearance (Brown & Graham 2008). Exercising for weight management was associated with negative body image when female undergraduate regular exercisers were studied, as compared to exercising for health reasons which was positively associated with self-esteem (McDonald & Thompson 1992).

Markland and Ingledew (1997) came up with a way to measure exercise motivations that distinguished between two types of motivations, extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivations are motivations such as appearance, competition, social recognition or affiliation, while intrinsic motivations are focused on stress management, enjoyment or challenge. Markland and Ingledew, found that extrinsic motives for exercise lead to stress in individuals, while intrinsic motives for exercise lead to the release of the stress. They concluded therefore that extrinsic motivations lead to a poorer psychological well-being and intrinsic motivations lead to a better psychological well-being. Maltby and Day (2001) also found that motivations can change over time and that people exercising for longer periods of time eventually develop intrinsic motivations even if they initially they



are extrinsically motivated. The authors conclude that over time, after experiencing the positive feelings associated with regular exercise individuals internalize intrinsic motivations for exercise that lead to increased psychological well-being.

### *Media's effect on Self-esteem, Body Image, and Eating Disorders*

The media plays a large role in instilling sociocultural pressures of ideal body types in people's ideal body perceptions. Men and women strategically give body appearance high importance, low importance or no importance depending on their ideology when it comes to gauging their self-esteem. Though people with different body image ideologies construct their self-esteem in different ways, the inescapable media standards are visible to some degree in their self-evaluations of their appearance (Bobbio 2009). Gillen & Lefkowitz (2006) found that women with non-traditional, feminist ideas about gender can reject more of the cultural messages about body image to be able to form their own perceptions of the body. Women with more traditional concepts about gender have a more difficult time rejecting the cultural messages about women's bodies and tend to internalize the cultural body ideal. They conclude that traditional thinking women tend to be less satisfied with their appearance due to the pressure they feel to live up to the narrow, difficult to obtain standards that American culture imposes.

The media, which often take the blame for the thin body ideal, also offer solutions for women who want to become thin. Women are bombarded with advertisements promising a quick fix for things in the form of weight loss pills, diet plans such as *Weight Watchers* or *Jenny Craig*, pre-packaged meals such as *Nutri-system*, plastic surgery, body wraps, and detoxifying cleanses. Many of these advertisements promise miraculous

results with testimonies from women claiming they have tried a multitude of products, claiming the product they are endorsing is the best way to lose weight quickly and keep it off. Gottschalk (1999) examined many of these advertisements in the format of television commercials, coining the term “speed culture” to describe how speed has been normalized and revered in American culture. Linking commodities such as weight-loss products with the promise of a speedy outcome makes the products more desirable and therefore a preferred choice to long term alternatives, such as exercise or changing food choices.

Women who want the culturally ideal body in Western society are socially pressured into getting it as quickly as possible. Vannini and McCright (2004) studied artificial tanners who claimed that a tan makes them appear attractive and fit as well as raising their confidence and self-esteem. While there are benefits to artificial tanning there are also drawbacks including health risks such as cancer, aging skin, and the monetary cost of tanning. The authors state the seductive power that the physical enhancement of tanning provides is completely dependent on the meanings people hold for tanned skin. The speed and immediacy to which Gottschalk (1999) referred is evident with artificial tanners in the Western world. The desire to give the impression of health (in this case by having tanned skin) may trump the desire to actually be healthy. This desire for speedy results is present not only in artificial tanners, but in women who use weight-loss pills, crash diets, or who are eating disordered.

Interestingly, since the 1980’s the focus for thinness has shifted also to a focus of control (Bordo 1993). Thin is not enough in our culture, women must also be toned, firm,

and smooth. No bulges, cellulite or wiggle are acceptable in today's society, even if a woman is thin. Bordo (1993; 191) states, "It is perfectly permissible in our culture (even for women) to have substantial weight and bulk- so long as it is tightly managed. Simply to be slim is not enough-the flesh must not 'wiggle'." Bordo (1993; 195) also explains that the fit body is a sign of class or social mobility, where the unfit body is seen as having a lower-class status due to moral qualities such as "fat being perceived as indicative of laziness, lack of discipline, unwillingness to conform, and absence of all those 'managerial' abilities that, according to the dominant ideology, confer upward mobility." In this way, displaying a thin and tight body is more socially acceptable, thus, holds class capital.

The goal of obtaining a 'perfect body' can be accomplished through many avenues such as plastic surgery, excessive exercise and eating disorders; many of which are related to depression, lowered psychological well-being, or shame due to a lowered sense of self-esteem (Brown & Graham 2008). Exercising to manage weight, improve muscle tone or enhance attractiveness (extrinsic motivations) for a woman is correlated with body dissatisfaction as well as eating disturbances (McDonald & Thompson 1990). Therefore, body dissatisfaction in women may have a large impact on the development of an eating disorder. Many women who adopt the concept of the ideal feminine body as being thin develop eating disorders in order to achieve that body ideal (Gillen & Lefkowitz 2006) .

According to Gillen & Lefkowitz (2006), an excessively feminine identity, or being overly engaged in the feminine role, contributes to a body image disturbance in

which a person's mental picture of themselves is distorted (e.g., an emaciated woman may think she appears fat) that can lead to lowered confidence, less happiness and eventually death through eating disorders (Gillen & Lefkowitz 2006). These body ideals are ingrained at a very young age. Studies found that adolescent girls who attempted to look like the women portrayed in the media became more concerned with their weight than their peers who were less concerned with looking like media images. The more their media-focused peers reinforced the thin ideal, the more likely the adolescent was to induce vomiting and use laxatives to attempt to copy the unobtainable bodies they idolized (Krones et. al. 2005). Media images contribute to eating disorders among girls and women of all ages; greater exposure to media is associated with internalizing the thin-ideal stereotype, which predicts greater body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. This effect however is especially prevalent in adolescence and young adulthood (Lin & Kulik 2002).

#### *Exercise Increase Associated Negatively with Self-Esteem*

According to Franzoi & Shields (1984), a woman's self-esteem as related to the body is composed of three separate parts. The first part relates to physical attractiveness; in order for a woman to sense she's attractive to others, she must self-evaluate. This process is mental, where she imagines how others will react to her appearance. She can use makeup or clothing to alter her outward appearance, making this part extrinsically motivated. The second part relates to physical attractiveness in that the body can be physically altered through diet or exercise. These body parts are usually the sexualized and objectified body parts. This second part is a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic

motivations. The third aspect of female body self-esteem is that of physical condition such as stamina, strength and agility, which are intrinsic qualities. Using this approach to the development of women's self-esteem, the more effort a woman puts forth in her appearance, whether for intrinsic or extrinsic reasons, the higher self-esteem she will feel.

In general, literature on exercise reports positive benefits to a person's psychological well-being. Some of the benefits include a reduction of stress, and depression and an increase in self-esteem (Maltby & Day 2001). Interestingly, several studies (Tiggeman & Williamson 2000; McDonald & Thompson 1992) have found there is a significant negative relationship between the amount of exercise, body satisfaction and self-esteem for young women in comparison to older women. As previously stated, women whose exercise motives are weight control, muscle tone and physical attractiveness tend to have a lower body satisfaction than women who exercise for other reasons such as health. The lowered self-esteem experienced specifically by young women is not explained by this finding.

Tiggeman & Williamson (2000), state that young women generally have a lower self-esteem than older women. This difference can be explained by the fact that media pressures are felt more strongly by young women. Much of the sociocultural pressure from the media is targeted directly at young women, meaning that older women experience less of that pressure. The authors theorize that the self-esteem that is negatively correlated with exercise could be due to the disappointment that young women feel when they attempt to achieve the nearly impossible thin cultural body ideal and fail. Therefore, the more such women exercise the more disappointment they feel, which can

then lead to the development of eating disorders. This concept is comparable to the previous study that stated extrinsically motivated women will not be as satisfied through exercise as are intrinsically motivated women.

Tiggeman & Williamson (2000) use objectification theory to frame their analysis. This theory explains how women and their bodies are sexually objectified in American culture. Women internalize sexual objectification and in turn begin to objectify themselves through body monitoring. According to Bartky (1990), “most women develop a male authority in their consciousness whose gaze and judgment are constant, a generalized male witness.” This practice has negative consequences for women when it comes to anxiety, body shame, motivation and self-awareness. Objectification theory states that young women are the most frequently targeted demographic for objectification. Young women understand their self-worth in regards to how well they can live up to the cultural standards of beauty (Brown & Graham 2008). Therefore as exercise contributes to their self-objectification it contributes to the elevated levels of body shame, or lowered self-esteem. Due to the social pressures that young women feel, their relationship to exercise is very different from that of men or even older women (Tiggeman & Williamson 2000).

Waskul (2002) explains that objectification can only occur by using the concept of taking the role of the other. He states that the body is both an experienced subject as well as a viewed object, the body as an object and a subject work together through taking the role of the other. More specifically, women take the told of a particular reference group, men, when viewing themselves, considering the “male gaze”. The daily

interactions people have that involve manipulating their appearance involve the person considering themselves a viewed object, assuring that their appearance is pleasing to those who will see it.

Women that subscribe to the cultural body ideal must achieve and maintain that identity. Many women monitor themselves as a response to their belief that they are constantly being watched and judged on their appearance. Foucault (1975) used the analogy of a panopticon, a tall watchtower in a prison yard where the inmates are uncertain whether or not they are being monitored, therefore they self-monitor to avoid negative consequences. In this analogy the prisoners become their own jailers, much like women in everyday life police themselves in striving to maintain cultural ideals of beauty. Whether they are being watched or not, women are constantly monitoring their own bodies.

### *Making Comparisons*

Women, especially those who are college age, express more dissatisfaction pertaining to their appearance and weight placing greater importance on, and investing more in, their appearance than do men (Gillen & Lefkowitz 2006). Another study states that men and women are equally dissatisfied with their bodies (Cohn & Adler 1992). Cohn and Adler found that men who are dissatisfied with their bodies either want to be thinner or heavier while women that express dissatisfaction in their body image desire a thinner figure and are more concerned about the prospect of becoming fat, and are more likely to diet than men. This pattern can be attributed to the sociocultural expectations of thinness for women. In a culture that idealizes thinness, it can be difficult for women to

accurately judge themselves. When women compare their body to the thin ideal American culture holds, they find themselves dissatisfied with their body image. The further from the thin body ideal (the larger the body mass), the more negative body image they have of themselves (Borchert & Heinberg 1996). When Gillen & Lefkowitz (2006), studied first year college students, though the average BMI of the women and men they studied was normal, they found that women were less satisfied with their appearance than the men were. The researchers attributed this difference to the sociocultural pressures that women feel to be very thin. The researchers concluded that women are more sensitive to these societal messages than men; therefore, they accept the messages and internalize them, leading to women investing more in their feminine appearance which can lead to a higher rate of social success, especially in college-aged women (Gillen & Lefkowitz 2006).

An alternative explanation for increased body dissatisfaction in college students specifically, states that in order to attend college, that person must first make a large financial commitment, thus most college students tend to be of a higher socioeconomic status than their peers who do not attend college. This is significant because research shows that members of higher socio-economic statuses focus more attention on their desire to be thin (Gillen & Lefkowitz 2006).

Research suggests that Caucasian women hold differing body ideals than African American women do. According to Lovejoy (2001), African American women tend to be more satisfied with their body size, weight and overall appearance as compared to Caucasian women. Lovejoy posits that this difference is due to “the cultural construction



of femininity in African American and white communities (241)”. She theorizes that African American women are raised to be strong, independent, and self-reliant, as they typically have not been able to rely on men for economic support and are many times responsible for financially providing for the family, unlike many white middle-class women. Boyd et. al (2011) further articulated that white women in contrast are socialized to use intimate relationships with men to secure their well-being. Thus the cultural messages about gender received by African American women and White middle class women are distinctly different.

Boyd et. al (2011) also found that higher-status girls are more susceptible to feeling the cultural body image pressure, supporting the idea that a women of dominant racial groups may be more affected by media images. She states that hegemonic ideals of thinness are difficult for any woman to resist, but more difficult to ignore for White women than for African American women due to the cultural differences. This finding is consistent with Milkie’s (1999) study that found white respondents wanted to appear similar to media images, though they found the images unrealistic. She also found that African American women were more likely to make negative comments about the artificiality in the media, wanting more diverse images available.

Many body satisfaction issues stem from women comparing themselves to others, typically media images, but the comparisons women make on a daily basis with peers are arguably more impactful and much less researched (Wasilenko et. al. 2007; Lin & Kulik 2002; Krones et.al. 2005) Krones et al. (2005) found that women exposed to magazine images of ultrathin models experienced negative emotions such as stress, guilt,

depression, insecurity, shame and body dissatisfaction. They further found that women exposed to images of their attractive peers led to greater body dissatisfaction than images of attractive models. The exposure/ active engagement in social comparative pressure to be thin increases body dissatisfaction, which is a common pathway to the development of eating disorders.

The tripartite influence model of body image (Thompson et. al. 1999) examines the ways in which women's body images are shaped by 3 important social agents: family, peers, and media. This framework asserts that each of these entities provide feedback to women regarding how their bodies "are supposed" to be shaped. Women then internalize such messages that generally emphasize societal standards of thinness. This theory helps to explain body dissatisfaction as well as eating disorders.

Social comparison theory, coined by Festinger (1954), may be perhaps the best explanation of why and how women compare themselves to others. Social comparison theory suggests that people are driven to evaluate themselves, and in order to do so, they compare themselves with others. Festinger explains that because there is no objective criterion to evaluate oneself against, people turn to comparing themselves to similar others. Women evaluating themselves may find that they can compare themselves to celebrities but tend to focus more on similar others (Festinger 1954).

Social comparison theory explains that when people compare themselves to others who are better off in some way than they are can lead to decreased self-regard (Wasilenko et. al. 2007). This theory can help to explain how the media's thin figured female ideals lead to body dissatisfaction as well as eating disorders. Social comparison

theory suggests that in order to get the most accurate self-appraisal people prefer to compare themselves to similar others rather than unobtainable images of celebrities (Lin & Kulik 2002). Multiple studies focused on the direction of comparisons to determine body satisfaction. These studies explained that comparing oneself to someone who is perceived to be better in some way is known as upward comparison. In contrast, comparing oneself to someone perceived as lesser than oneself could be called downward comparisons. Upward comparison is found to lead to diminished body satisfaction; this might suggest that downward comparison leads to an increase in body satisfaction, though studies have not supported this claim (Lin & Kulik 2002; Wasilenko et. al. 2007; Krones et. al. 2005). College-aged women frequently use the strategy of social comparison with their peers. When they compare themselves to peers who are thinner than they are they report decreased body satisfaction as the theory would suggest (Wasilenko et. al. 2007).

#### *Weight Stigmatized People, Exercise Environment and the Avoidance Technique*

Differences in the environments within which women exercise can affect self-esteem as well as exercise routines. In their study, Wasilenko et. al. (2007) found that the close presence of a fit peer in the gym lowered the amount of time a woman would exercise while the presence of an unfit peer increased the duration of her workout. The implications of this finding suggest that the presence of an unfit peer can be a motivation to get or stay fit and the presence of a fit peer can be uncomfortable as people tend to avoid comparisons with others that may result in negative self-image. This avoidance of comparisons with fit peers could contribute to the high attrition rates (40-65%) for

exercise programs during the first 3-6 months as people who are uncomfortable around fit-peers avoid the negative feelings they experience by discontinuing the program (Wasilenko et. al. 2007).

Not only can the fitness level of peers affect women, but the gender of the peers in the gym has an effect as well. Kruisselbrink et.al. ( 2004) studied social physique anxiety (SPA) which is the “anxiety that people experience in response to others’ evaluations of their physiques,” in regards to gender stratification in the gym. They found that women showed a higher SPA than men in general. Additionally, the presence of men increased this feeling. The women felt the highest SPA in an all-male setting, then the second highest SPA in a mixed-gender setting and the least SPA in an all-female setting. Women would shorten their workout to avoid the discomfort in an all-male setting but not in the mixed or all female settings. This information illuminates the concept that exercising in an all-female gym, such as *Curves*, may have the least negative impact on a woman’s exercise behavior.

It is uncomfortable for many women to work out with others who have different fitness levels as well as to work out with men present. Those factors aside, being significantly overweight in a gym setting is especially uncomfortable for women wanting to exercise (Vartanian & Shaprow 2008). Stigma and discrimination against obese women is prevalent. Studies on obese college-aged females have shown that weight stigma is associated with decreased self-esteem, decreased body satisfaction and increased levels of depression (Vartanian & Shaprow 2008). This stigma can impact women’s weight management efforts, which can negatively affect their well-being and

health. Instead of reacting to weight stigma by dieting or trying to change themselves, obese people are more inclined to binge-eat, skip meals, use laxatives and avoid dieting. The stigma not only affects a person's behavior to be inconsistent with healthy weight management, but may also cause that individual to avoid physical activities due to potential teasing or other insensitive behaviors. The authors suggest that a more accepting exercise environment would make it easier for weight-stigmatized people to exercise as it would lessen the necessity of using techniques such as avoidance to alleviate discomfort concerning exercise, therefore obese people might be more inclined to use such a facility.

The avoidance of physical activities is a double edged sword for an obese individual. Not only are they less likely to become healthier, but they are also less likely to lose weight that might actually reduce the stigma that they experience. Weight stigmatized people often don't react to comments about their weight in a positive way as those comments are usually emotionally damaging and counterproductive to their weight management efforts (Vartanian & Shaprow 2008). While the most common people to make unhelpful comments are families and doctors, they are also the people who impact the obese the most to avoid exercise. This avoidance is often caused by embarrassment and/or shame. Embarrassment is the anticipated or actual negative evaluations that a person receives from other people. In the case of obese people, it often causes them to avoid exercise around other people. People who are not obese can also experience weight stigma in many ways such as being teased, which may lead them to decrease their exercise behaviors. A separate exercise facility could help to decrease the discomfort obese people feel in many gym settings. For obese people this space would be a size-

accepting space focused on health rather than appearance. For women this space would be shared only with other women (Vartanian & Shaprow 2008).

In Western society, muscles symbolize masculinity. Some men choose to use weight lifting to increase their muscle mass, therefore increasing their masculinity (Schilling 1993). Muscles have been socially constructed as masculine due to the loss of many of the masculine manual labor jobs which produced muscles that were previously a sign of a class or occupation (Gill 2005). The association between masculinity and weight lifting is frequently a deterrent for women to participate in weight lifting as most strive for the thin feminine ideal and do not want to appear masculine (Salvatore & Marecek 2010).

From a health perspective, strength training is very important for women as it slows aging, helps prevent illness, lessens psychological issues such as depression and eating disorders, increases metabolism, prevents osteoporosis, promotes overall fitness, and often diminishes body dissatisfaction. According to Salvatore and Marecek (2010) even with all the known benefits of weight lifting, many women avoid this area of the gym. The authors further explain that a reason for women to avoid weight lifting is that they have evaluation concerns, meaning they are focused on what others are thinking about them, and they may feel as if they are being watched, scrutinized or judged negatively by others in the gym. The evaluation concerns focus upon engaging in an activity in public that is seen as a counter-normative behavior, or a behavior that violates social expectations. In this way women may avoid the activity of weight lifting or the setting of the gym altogether, because they are discouraged.

According to Salvatore & Marecek (2010), the avoidance of the gym or weight lifting specifically occurs through multiple self-perpetuating cycles. The gym or weight lifting activities may be avoided by women because this is seen as a masculine space or activity; the lack of women in the gym or weight training facilities reinforces this stereotype and women's avoidance of that space or activity. Evaluation concerns stem from being seen as incompetent; regarding weight lifting for women, the less they participate the less proficiency they will have and which leads to more concern of evaluation from the people around them, another self-perpetuating cycle.

### *Framing the Study*

The theoretical framework of symbolic interaction lends itself to studies of the body, especially the construction of self in that the body is a social object and holds meanings that the owner attaches to it and the modifications that the owner makes to it. The differing motivations to exercise for men and women can be analyzed through this framework in that "messages and meanings are conveyed through the body and it plays a symbolic role in perpetuating gender hierarchies between and within the genders" (Brown & Graham 2008:95).

The literature reviewed has outlined the experiences of exercise and body maintenance in the lives of women. The pervasive media images of the thin ideal woman are ingrained in American society as well as the women who live in it. Literature reviewed has also outlined the reasons that women might avoid the gym, or just specific parts of the gym and women's motivations for exercise. Although the motivations for exercise for women tend to be in the pattern of extrinsic motivations such as weight

management, muscle tone and physical attractiveness, there are also intrinsic motivations for women such as health and pleasure. The research that is lacking in previous studies is why women join a gym and actively continue exercise. Many women may desire to be more attractive, toned or thinner but do not take any measures such as exercise to make that happen.

Society's gendered body ideals have a large impact on women today. The pressure that a young woman feels from society to conform to those body ideals can be immense. The pressure comes from media images bombarding young women as well as the appearance of their peers with whom they make social comparisons. If the motivation for a young woman to exercise stems from the desire to physically conform to the thin female body ideal, previous research states the extrinsically motivated woman will find only short-term positive effects from exercise and these reasons may lead to the high attrition rates that can be seen at gyms for many women.

Previous studies on women's fitness encompass a wide range of sociocultural factors that affect women's exercise choices. Women may feel pressure to fit the cultural standard for thin females in the Western society and may use multiple avenues to reach that goal. This pressure also leads to women comparing themselves with others, which can negatively affect their self-esteem. The societal pressure may motivate them to begin an exercise routine, but that routine may not be long-term depending on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. This research will examine the reasons that some women make fitness a lifestyle. I also aim to examine how social comparisons affect a woman's self-evaluation and how that process will affect their exercise decisions.



The questions that provide the foundation for my study are:

- What motivates some women to begin/continue exercising regularly?
- To whom do women regularly compare themselves for body image self-assessment?
- How do women's perceptions of self affect their decisions related to exercise?
- How do women perceive the ideal body type and how does that affect their exercise decisions?
- How do the structural circumstances of women's lives (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, or race) impact their decisions regarding exercise?
- How are women's relationships relevant to understanding their choices and behaviors regarding exercise?

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This research employed qualitative interviewing to better understand what initially motivates women to exercise and what motivates them to continue to exercise or to discontinue exercise. I was particularly interested in the ways in which such decisions are shaped by overarching social structures, such as gender, relationships, and media, within which women live their everyday lives. An important goal of this research design is to capture the understandings and rationale of the research participants attempting to make sense of their choices regarding exercise. Thus, I chose a method that would best emphasize the experiences of participants from their point of view. Data was collected

by semi-structured in-depth interviews. I chose this data collection tool for this study because: a) it will provide more detailed and perspectival information by using open-ended interviews and b) this study is exploratory in that it examines the social context of exercise attrition rates. I utilized Charmaz's (2006) approach to grounded theory methods to guide my data collection and analysis processes.

### *Sample Selection and Recruitment*

The participants in the study were 11 women, college-aged (19-27 years). Of the participants, four were African American and seven were Caucasian, three had children and one was married. The women selected have exercised on a regular basis (3-6 days a week) for at least three consecutive months during the past year. This provides a sample of women who can talk about the central topic of study for this project, women's experiences of continuing or discontinuing regular exercise routines.

The sample was obtained through a combination of convenience sampling and snow-ball method sampling. I interviewed women who are active exercisers and asked for them to pass my information on to other women who have exercised on a regular basis within the past year. The sample included three interviews with women with whom I was acquainted, and followed with three more women identified by snowball sampling. The final five participants were obtained through a process of posting flyers on a social media website.

*Interview Process*

To conduct the interviews, I suggested a quiet location with little interruption due to the audio recording of the interview. Three of the participants chose to interview at my residence, one chose to interview at her residence, two chose to interview in my office and one chose to be interviewed in her office. I created an informed consent form that I explained to each participant before the interview (see Appendix III). This form explains that I will not use their names or other identifying information in published reports. It also explains that participation is voluntary and can be terminated at any time if requested by the participant. The form also states that the transcript of the interview as well as the informed consent form will be available only to myself and my advisor, Dr. Vicki Hunter, and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in an office on campus for a period of three years after the completion of my thesis.

I asked very broad, open-ended questions asking about their workout routines and habits. I then asked questions about when, how and why they began working out, what their initial motivations were and what was going on in their life at that time. I also asked why they discontinued working out or what motivated them to continue working out. I asked about their body satisfaction and goals they have pertaining to it, and the plans in place to reach those goals. I used probing questions as well throughout the interview to obtain more details or to explore pertinent things they brought up that I hadn't anticipated. (See Appendix II for interview questions).

During the interviews I remained as passive as possible while still building a rapport with the woman I was interviewing. I found this easier with the women who I did

not already know. I focused on the participant's story and allowed her to tell me her reasons and ideas without much influence from myself.

After each interview was completed I transcribed it and coded it before I moved on to another interview. By transcribing and coding as I collected my data I was able to ask questions of things that have come up in previous interviews that I had not previously considered, such as the women attributing their bodies to their family genetics. I then wrote memos as I completed my interviews, transcriptions and coding in order to collect my thoughts and identify patterns and themes. Modified grounded theory guided this research in order to allow the analysis to emerge from the data (Charmaz 2006).

I began the coding process using line-by-line coding, where each line of the transcript was examined individually and labeled with codes (categories of meaning.) Following the advice of Charmaz (2006) I used primarily gerunds to label codes; doing so emphasizes the worldview of the respondent. After several interviews, recurring and prominent codes emerged. The analysis of additional interviews then became more focused in that I continued by expounding upon and better understanding the developing codes. Coding also includes the process of comparing and contrasting codes across and within the interviews. Memo-writing occurred throughout the coding process as well as after coding and while I was writing my analysis. Memo-writing allows a researcher to examine emerging themes within their coding and to collect important thoughts, quotes, and insight that could later be used to find more emerging patterns, concepts and ideas. My analysis chapters were built upon the emerging patterns discussed in the memos I developed.

I managed and minimized potential risks, including embarrassment by making the participant feel as comfortable as I could, assuring that the research is confidential, and thanking them for sharing information with me for my research. I did not come across any issues in this study.

There may have been other issues that came into play as I am their peer, and previous literature states that young women compare themselves with their peers, which may make them uncomfortable in answering personal questions about their appearance and feelings. The literature reviewed states that peer comparisons have negative consequences only when the person they are comparing themselves to appears better in some way. Therefore, in order to lessen the issue of peer comparison I conducted my interviews dressed in a way that did not show my body, wore little to no makeup, relaxed hairstyle and professional appearance in clothing choice. I did not find that the participants were uncomfortable speaking with me as the women were fairly candid.

## ANALYSIS

### *Women's Bodies in Relation to Others*

Women tend to develop their sense of self through their relationship with others, unlike men who develop a self through separation from others and independence (Chodorow 1999). Many of the women in this study did not talk only about their bodies, but they situated their bodies in relation to others. For example, many women explained how their bodies differed with bodies of women from higher socio-economic status groups. Women also focused on how their bodies are shaped today due to family

attributes, such as a larger frame. A few of the women were mothers and explained how the relationship with their bodies has changed from pre-baby to their current body after having a child. Women use body comparisons to others as a way of measuring themselves, it instills competition and many times insecurities in women (Hesse-biber 1996).

*Comparing bodies to others of a higher socio-economic status vs. peers*

Festinger (1954) proposed social comparison theory that provides a helpful lens with which to analyze the ways in which women are influenced by media images. The theory suggests that individuals evaluate themselves based on how they compare themselves to certain others, which many participants discussed within their interview. Festinger found that people tend to compare themselves to similar others, a theory that is supported by the following data. An important finding is how women compare themselves to their peers and media images differently.

April, Kelsie, Lauren, Miranda and Molly all explained that they look up to women who have their ideal body image, though they realize that they may never be able to look that way. These women explained that celebrities have access to many more resources than they do. These structural differences separate the celebrity's bodies from the bodies of their peers by making it seem unattainable to have a celebrity body. This does not mean that these women do not want to look like the celebrities, but instead that they recognize that they cannot afford to look like them. Celebrities are in a higher position in the social structure, affording them more access to resources and the ability to shape their bodies accordingly (Bordo 1993). These findings support the existing

literature that states women tend to compare themselves to peers, resulting in body image goals that are more attainable compared to the falsely flawless celebrity images (Wasilenko et. al. 2007; Lin & Kulik 2002; Krones et.al. 2005).

April explains that it takes a lot of money and time for a celebrity to look the way they do. Her description of what resources celebrities have access to alludes to her understanding of her position in the social structure of society and the position of celebrities. Therefore, she does not see their bodies as realistic as she would not be able to attain a body that people with an abundance of resources can attain. April explains,

“I don’t have the money to pay a personal trainer to work me out every day or like pay a chef to fix exactly all the foods that are going to help me lose weight, so [celebrities] don’t affect me as much.... I don’t really base myself off of them ‘cause it is not realistic.”

Lauren shares April’s ideas that celebrity bodies are unattainable, or as she states “in a separate category.” Lauren explains that she does compare herself to other people around her, especially in a group social setting, but she doesn’t focus on celebrity images. Many of the women in this study share the idea that comparing themselves to celebrities would be like comparing apples and oranges.

“I mean I am sure on some level I do [compare myself to celebrities]. I think they [celebrities] are in a separate category. I think I’m much more likely to compare myself to those around me. I mean I am sure I do. At this stage I am just not sure that I knowingly do so or compare. I am sure there are plenty of ways that I do. But not in like a conscious, or on a really conscious level.”

Instead of trying to look like a celebrity April compares herself to people that are her friends or peers because they have the same resources that she has and they have what she thought of as attainable body goals. By comparing herself to someone that has the

same structural access to resources she states that these people are ‘realistic’ people who have more resources are not a realistic comparison to her.

“I have a friend who started working out and like over a year she lost all this weight, then I start to feel bad because I am like we are in the same boat, she doesn’t have a ton of money or time but she can do it why can’t I? So I don’t find myself comparing to celebrities I compare myself to like, realistic people.”

April finds that she compares her body to that of her friends or peers because she views their bodies as “realistic”. Lin and Kulik (2002) found that women compare themselves to similar others, such as peers, more frequently than media celebrities. April, Lauren and Kelsie demonstrated this finding when discussing how they compare their bodies to others. Women often understand that celebrity bodies are unrealistic due to electronic image manipulation and other techniques.

Many of the women in this study explained how their concept of an ideal body has shifted from the celebrity images to peer comparisons as they aged. This pattern could be explained by the understanding of the structure of society deepening with age. It is not that these women do not want to look like celebrities as they age, but instead that they understand that due to different access to resources celebrity bodies are unattainable. Kelsie’s statement illustrates how when she was younger a ‘nice body’ was that of thin celebrities shown in the media, but as she aged her perceptions of a ‘nice body’ changed.

“my image of what makes a nice body has changed, you know, starting when I was 10, 11, 12, and you start looking at celebrities and media and I always had this idea that the thinner you are the better, and I always wanted to be just super skinny, I never thought of a perfect body any other way but skinny and now I have this healthy body definition, tone and curve and that is me and what makes a good body.”



Amy also reflects on what type of body she found to be beautiful when she was younger, which is similar to what Kelsie described. She previously compared herself to skinny models on TV, but later found that she did not find a skinny body to be healthy.

“When I was younger skinny was what I thought was most beautiful. I wanted to be as skinny as all the models I saw on TV. I thought that was what was beautiful and then I started to realize that it was not healthy and not attainable”

Amy’s statement that being ‘skinny’ is not attainable refers back to the lack of resources she has compared to the models on TV. Miranda also explained how her views of female body image were shaped through her media experiences when growing up. She explains how she was socialized by the TV and magazines to think that skinny was beautiful and how she really appreciates the recent changes being made in some media that show other bodies as beautiful as well.

“when you look at magazines, all you see are really skinny people. Or people on TV are just really thin, they look really frail. Growing up that's what I though I was supposed to look like. ‘Cause when you’re little no one really tells you what you’re supposed to be. And you just kind of create this own idea, of what’s around you and what you look at. I'm really happy that Dove has those commercials now with all the different size women, like being happy with who you are, and if you want to change that's okay. It’s okay to want to change, but you don't have to conform. That's really nice to see.”

Molly explained the way she views women in the media is also very different from how she views her peers. She views her peers as ‘real people’, but does not view celebrities as ‘real’, therefore she keeps her body comparisons between herself and her peers. Molly states, “I do, compare myself to the three girls I normally work out with...because those are real people in my eyes.”

Several respondents stated that they compare themselves to peers instead of seemingly flawless celebrity images. These participants' descriptions of how they compare their bodies to others support Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory in that these women compare themselves to similar others instead of someone in a separate socio-economic position in the structure of society. This research also supports Hesse-biber's (1996) findings that comparing bodies for women leads to insecurities for the women.

### *Women's bodies after baby*

Symbolic interaction has also been apparent throughout participants' interviews when discussing how they create a construction of self in that the body is a social object for the meanings that the owner attaches to it. Kelsie illustrates symbolic interaction when she discusses how her body has changed due to having a child, the social object of her body as well as her view of self changes over time. After having a child her expectations and body shape are not the same. She understands that she can change her body, but has what she considered realistic expectations for her body post-pregnancy.

“After having my son, my stomach changed a lot and that is probably the area I think about the most and want to get more toned. I have also come to the realization that there are things that are never going to be the way they were before... My hips are bigger than some of my friends' hips but you know I have had a child and that is just the way it is.”

Kelsie's statement illustrates support for Festinger's (1956) social comparison theory in that she cannot compare her body to her friends as they are not similar others

due to not having a baby as she did. Another participant Tina also discussed the changes she experienced in having her first child and how it has affected how she views her body:

“[She] was my first child so I didn’t know what to expect and I ended up gaining about 60 pounds, stretch marks came and after I had her I was like this is going to be so hard, but, you know, I changed my mindset, I’ve seen moms that have had four kids and their bodies are amazing so I changed my mindset to if they can do it I can do it and started”

Once Tina started working out she explained how she became happier with her body. Tina’s statement demonstrates Hesse-biber’s (1996) findings that women’s body comparisons instill competition. She became motivated to change her body after seeing that other mothers have done so and that it is possible. As Tina and Kelsie demonstrated once they started working out they became much more satisfied with their body tone and attractiveness. Both of these women have an idealized image of the perfect body, but they also realize that this body ideal may not be attainable for them due to having a child or their genetic makeup.

#### *Comparing bodies to family members*

Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory explaining that women compare themselves to similar others is supported through the multiple respondents who mentioned that their body is the way it is due to their genetic makeup by comparing themselves to their close relatives. Viewing a mother, sister or other family members as a similar other, many of the women stated how they compared their bodies with other family members. Kelsie stated,

“There are things about my body that are genetic and are never going to be changed... I have friends that even if they are bigger than I am and don’t exercise as much as I am and they don’t have any cellulite, and I do you know I look at my mom and she has it so it is genetic and I can work out and eat healthy all I

want and it is just a part of my body and I have to learn to accept it ... I really want more definition in my legs right now they are kind of like a block which I know is kind of like my body makeup because I just have big thighs and that is the way it is, and my mom has big thighs and my grandma has big thighs so I know they are not going to be like crazy defined cause that is my makeup.”

Another respondent explains how she compares her body to others but realizes that she won't be able to attain the body that other women have due to her genetic makeup. Emily explains that,

“I would get jealous ‘cause one girl has like the genes that she can get fit and tone easier that I can't because of my genes. So it is just like oh I wish I had that...”

Emily is explaining that she is lacking the resource of genes. Lauren understands that her body is similar to the bodies of many people in her family. She specifically mentions the women in her family, but also stated how similar the males in her family look to her as well.

“Especially women. We are on the shorter side. I am just about 5'2”. My lovely grandma is 4'11” ish. She peaked there and is a little shorter. The women in my genetic family are really short. And very thick calves. Strong relatively. Broader shoulders for women, but not absurdly. A lot of my features can correlate easily to my family's. ‘You gave me this!!!’”

The majority of the respondents explained that they compare themselves to others; though the most frequent comparison for these women is comparing themselves to their peers, supporting the findings of Lin & Kulik (2002). Multiple studies of social comparison theory are supported by the respondent's testimonials of comparing themselves to peers bodies that they view as more attainable they are able to get a self-appraisal than if they were to compare themselves to the seemingly unattainable ideal that

the media projects for a woman's body (Wasilenko et. al. 2007; Lin & Kulik 2002; Kronen et.al. 2005).

### *Women's Relationships and Exercise*

Chodorow (1999) explained the importance of relationships for women and their own self-identification. Women in this study described the impact of friends and significant others on their exercise practices. A few women also framed their upcoming event such as a wedding, or a race as motivation to exercise for fitness as well as appearance for others. Cooley's (1902) looking-glass self is also apparent in women's relationships and fitness. Many of the women are trying to determine how others are judging them in everyday life as well as in gym settings.

### *Exercising with others*

Chodorow's (1999) finding that women are very relationship focused held true for the women interviewed. Most of the women in this study stated that they used working out with other people as a motivation. In some cases the other person is the initial motivation and for others working out with someone helped them to stay on track by keeping them accountable. April explained that she likes the accountability of exercising with others and it helps her to actually make her exercise goal.

"I say I am going to run and then if I am not waiting for somebody to meet me or something then I might just put it off and not go... I've got a classmate who, we go to the same workout classes so I will go with her and then she goes to the gym with me on those Mondays when I go."

Emily also stated that working out with friends motivates her and that they keep each other accountable for exercising.

“I would say having friends that go to the classes with me makes it easy to keep you motivated. If you don’t want to go it is not like you are just letting yourself down but you are letting other people down cause you are probably the same motivator for them. I find like if two of them don’t go to a class, I find it harder for me to go to the class by myself.”

Molly explains that she and her friends may not physically exercise together each time, but they do share their workouts with each other online. They do this to hold each other accountable and to keep track of their goals. Molly explains that her Nike watch keeps track of how far she ran by using a disk she inserts in her shoe. After her workout she uploads the information that the watch tracked onto a website that she shares with her friends. They can all track her progress and using this technology they can help keep her accountable.

“I have a Nike watch and I put it in the computer and I feel like ‘look what you have done in the last month and a half’. It is nice for me to see how far I have come from not working out at all...it helps me because, I share my profile with two of my friends on Nike so if I am not running my three miles I have committed to run I get a text from one of the gals. It just happened the other day, like I see you didn’t make 3 mile it was like 2.8 and my calves hurt. She said .2 is not that much and it keeps me honest and I can’t be like ya I ran three miles when I only did 2.8.”

By having a physical or virtual workout partner to keep them accountable to stick to their exercise schedule, April, Emily and Molly have found it easier to exercise. Their descriptions are consistent with the panopticon effect described by (Foucault 1975). Being monitored by their friends, or in the case of the Nike watch, facing the possibility of being monitored by their friends, they are more likely to monitor themselves in

relation to their exercise habits. April discussed enjoying exercise classes with others working out with her. These classes helped her to stay on task with her work-out, took the guess-work out of what she should be doing during the workout and were a motivation to her. April states,

“Sometimes I just feel like when I go by myself I have no direction, so if someone else can plan it for me and provide me motivation while I am doing it, along with having other struggling to get through the workout at the same time, it motivates me more.”

April uses the motivation of working out with others to help her get through her exercise classes. April’s statement also supports the ideas of speed culture in that she stated she doesn’t have time to figure out what she needs to be doing in the gym, therefore attending a class is helpful in that it is fast and saves her time. Amy reflects April’s idea of having other people around, especially males in order to motivate her to exercise harder. Kruisselbrink et. al. (2004) found that the sex of the peers in the gym have an effect on exercise practices as well, leading to women shortening their workouts to avoid the scrutiny and stress from having males present in the gym. Kathy’s statement supports Kruisselbrink’s findings.

“I mean when I am alone I like the gym but I would like to umm start working out in my room and stuff. Cause you know sometimes people will judge you even like I don’t really care about that really but it is just like ‘stop looking at me’ and of course when I am in a group setting then wherever.”

Amy does not have the same feelings about people watching her workout as Kathy does. Amy’s testimony did not hold true to Kruisselbrink’s conclusions. She enjoys working out in front of others. Amy explained,

“it depends on how I feel, if I am feeling anti-social, I would prefer that the gym be empty and if I am feeling like I want to be motivated and pushed, it is nice to have like people like guys, this sounds weird but a lot of guys will stare at you so you want to show off in a way if that makes sense.”

Kelsie explained that she fell in love with exercising at a point in her life when her friend first brought her to an exercise class with her. Kelsie also exercises with her son by going on bike rides or running with him often. Kelsie focuses on running a lot so she does often exercise alone, but she also said, “I have a couple of friends that are also training for racing so I have been running with them too.” Kelsie continues to explain how she likes to train with others as it gives her motivation. Even when she is working out alone, she likes to do it in an environment with other people around. She doesn’t like the gym to be packed, but she doesn’t like to be there alone either. Kelsie explained,

“I also like to work out at the gym ‘cause it is nice when other people are around not when it is super busy but also not when it is just you or just you and 2 other people in the whole gym just so there is a small number of people in there.”

Exercising with others can also be used as an activity to spend time with someone as Cindy explained, “I really enjoy working out with someone else too cause I am so busy, that is usually a time that I can work out and get my social [time]in.” Cindy’s statement about multi-tasking supports speed culture in that she makes time for all of her activities by doing some at the same time to save time. Miranda views exercising with others as a distraction from her workout and only for social time. Therefore she prefers to exercise alone, supporting Kruisselbrink’s statements. She states,

“I like working out by myself because I'm very focused when I workout. But when I work out with friends, they want to make it like a social activity, so when



I do workout with other people, I usually end up going back again or go a 1/2 hour early to get the stuff I want to get done.”

In other cases, women work out with others to get motivation, to make exercising more fun, and for many other reasons. When women exercise in fitness settings such as a gym, they may feel more comfortable with someone by their side. There are other settings in which women feel as if they must have someone else with them for safety reasons to exercise. The statement that Lauren makes clearly distinguishes the gender role differences in exercise practices.

“It’s hard when you are working full time and I’m a woman, at a certain point [in time] you can’t run outside by yourself. You can’t go do those things by yourself... I love running at night. I wish I was a dude; it’s very quiet and very calming. But it’s not a very safe place to do it as a woman. I do run at night with friends. I still have friends who think that is crazy that I go with another girl. I have a headlamp and stuff to go. But it is not safe or smart to run at night as a woman. I don’t scare easy but I know I have plenty of friends and family that would not be ok if I told them I was running at night in [the city] by myself. Running at night, you can be difficult to be seen. Just a lot of safety issues in general. But I actually love night running... this isn’t to advocate that men should run at night alone. Not that there isn’t any dangers to them. There is, I think as a woman, there is perception that you are putting yourself out there to be vulnerable when you necessarily shouldn’t. And like I said even in bad areas, men shouldn’t run at night either. I think it’s a heightened place for safety wise where precautions must be taken. I guess I do know girls that run at night, and I don’t look down on them. I think you have to use your judgment, like what is putting yourself out there. What is ok, and what is not smart. When I was [back home] in certain neighborhoods... they were very safe, and I knew my neighbors. I knew that place and growing up there. Now living in [the city], it isn’t necessarily the safest of areas to run by yourself. But I think there is a special heightened awareness when you are a girl.”

For Lauren, exercising in her preferred environment is dangerous due to factors in society that make women feel unsafe alone at night. Therefore, if she wants to run at night, she will not do so alone. These are difficulties that most men do not deal with in our society. Exercising with others can be used for accountability reasons, safety reasons,

or socializing reasons. Interviews found that most women prefer to exercise with others while some women are neutral and few women prefer exercising alone, this shows support for Chodorow's findings that women are very relationship focused.

### *Exercise in relation to significant others*

Kruisselbrink et. al's (2004) study found that women had higher social physique anxiety in an all-male setting or mixed-sex setting and have the least anxiety in all-female setting. It is uncomfortable for many women to work out with other women that have different fitness levels as well as to work out with members of the opposite sex present. These findings do not hold true in the interviews as both April, Kelsie, Tina and Emily explain working out with their significant others. In fact, Miranda's significant other got her involved with running races in the first place.

“My brother was always a runner and then I started seeing someone that was into doing races and things. And they just did it for fun, and I made it like a competitive thing and used it to my advantage to keep me motivated. So I got into it in that aspect and then I just kind of kept going with it. I'm not seeing that person anymore, but it's just so much fun that, I mean, I love it, I love the atmosphere and I love learning about the nutrition of it and learning how your body works. Ugh, I love it. I think it's so much fun.”

Molly explains that though she cannot exercise with her boyfriend, due to his size and his focus when it comes to body building, she can go to him for advice. Exercise and fitness do still play a role in their relationship, though they are doing different activities separately. Molly views her male boyfriend as an expert on fitness due to his previous experience, and possibly due to the fact that he is male and exercise has been viewed as a masculine activity (Gill 2005, Schilling 1993, Salvatore & Marecek 2010).

“My boyfriend is a defensive lineman on the football team so he is twice the size of me. He doesn’t like to just go for a run ‘cause if he went for a run his knees would kill him so I like to talk to him for advice like if I have sore calves or sore arms, anything that is like bothering me, I can go to him for advice because he has been doing this for so long.”

April and her boyfriend bought a gym membership together to save money and to be able to exercise together. April explained about purchasing the co-membership, “so I decided to do that ‘cause I thought I might like to do some weights with him over the summer.” Kelsie explained that she exercised with her boyfriend as well, “I do have a lot of friends who um, exercise regularly and my previous boyfriend was really physically fit and exercised a lot so it was something we could do together.”

Emily and her boyfriend are currently in a long-distance relationship as she is finishing graduate school in another city. Emily explained her plans to exercise with her boyfriend when she moves back with him after school. “I will get a gym membership with my boyfriend. He used to be a physical trainer in the military. It will be nice ‘cause he knows what to do and he has that experience.”

Many of the women interviewed expressed the need for having an experienced knowledgeable male guide, whether a friend or a significant other. Emily explains that she looks forward to working out with her boyfriend as he provides her fitness guidance. According to Salvatore & Marecke (2010) the lack of proficiency of an activity, especially that of weight lifting leads women to having evaluation concerns. This theory is supported by the desire of these women to be instructed on gym equipment as Emily stated above. Emily explained her first encounters with her current boyfriend, “we met in the gym ‘cause he would always come in when I was about ready to leave and we had a

little time so we would stop and chat about working out or he would come a little early to give me pointers.”

Tina describes going to the gym and exercising with her boyfriend in high school with the motivation of losing weight, but after having a child she found getting back to the gym was difficult. “in high school, my boyfriend and I would go to the gym like every day just all about losing weight and all about fitness and after I had her [daughter] it was kind tough” In the interview Tina reveals that she is still with her boyfriend, together they wanted to improve themselves. They became each other motivators when working out, as she describes:

“I did end up moving in with him, and then you know we have been together for 5 years I think, as a couple we wanted to change ourselves. We were each other’s motivators. I just think it was more like we were at a, I don’t know how to say it, a comfort weight as a couple so we just decided we had better not, you know, be up to 300 pounds so it was like we had better do something now.”

Several participants made statements that put men in the position of expert when it comes to fitness. This supports Salvatore & Marecek’s (2010) findings of women having evaluation concerns and turning to men who are viewed as more knowledgeable in the gym by societal standards.

#### *Exercise as a reaction to an event*

Many of the women interviewed stated that they exercise with their significant others, though many also stated that their initial motivations for beginning to exercise occurred around the time of a break-up. Most of the women did not attribute their new interest in fitness directly to their break-up, though they began exercising regularly immediately following a break-up with their significant other. Kelsie stated, “Actually I

began working out after a breakup with a long term boyfriend. That is when I really started getting into it.” Similar to Kelsie, Amy explained that, “I broke up with my boyfriend, I was sick of drinking, I was sick of my party lifestyle, um I guess I kind of hit that age where I wanted to go somewhere I was tired of just doing nothing.” Emily also found herself beginning to exercise after a particularly abusive relationship ended.

“I first started exercising regularly after my last relationship ended with my ex. I started going to the gym more and I met my current boyfriend there... my past relationship was abusive, and he was emotionally abusive and physically abusive and all that. I had an eating disorder before I met him and he would make comments of how I was fat, but he would want me to eat because he wouldn't want people to notice I was losing weight. He would force me to eat and make comments about how I wasn't attractive but then he wouldn't let me work out either, like I would want to go to the gym, and he wouldn't want me to go to the gym. With taking classes on violence, it is like a control issue and that you know if I were to be out in public with like someone else and leave them and what not so there was a big issue and getting out of the relationship and working out built my confidence as I didn't have any after the relationship because of all the tearing down so it was a good way to build that up.”

Significant others have played a motivational role in these women's lives when it comes to their exercise habits. Some have positively motivated these women by exercising with them, others have motivated these respondents by ending the relationship. Whether positively motivated by their significant others to exercise, or motivated by a break-up many of the respondents described exercise as therapeutic to them, such as Emily described exercise as a way to build up her confidence. Kelsie found that exercise was a helpful outlet for her after her break-up.

“I began working out after a breakup with a long term boyfriend, that is when I really started getting into it...at the time I didn't really think of exercise as a therapy after the break up but now looking back at it I think it was in a way.”

Cindy also used exercise as a way to help her through her break-up and to take time for herself,

“having that time you know hour and a half, two hour, whatever it may be and hour sometimes or 30 minutes if I don’t have time for, just having that time to myself has been huge. Or is I am having a really bad day, being able to go do that is helpful and even like while was going through the initial parts of my breakup like that was still kind of a place for me to go.”

Even after Emily worked through her break-up from her abusive relationship and found herself focused on other facets of her life she still turns to the gym as an outlet for her stress. Emily explains,

“I find that is grad school I am really stressed out and taking an hour off and go to the gym and you are able to leave the stress behind while you are working out and then come back to what you were doing with a fresh mind.”

Kathy also uses exercise to deal with her stress about school. Kathy describes how she feels when she finishes exercising,

“Well like I said I have, well exercise has always been like a, what do you call it, like a de-stressor. You know, I am stressed out , things are not going well cause after I exercise I feel like you know ten times better like I am walking on air, umm, so...”

Molly also uses exercise as therapy. She explains that she has a difficult time getting motivated to do anything in the winter and finds that exercise helps her to deal with that stress and continue on with her daily duties.

“Well I always get like winter blues; I can’t stand the winter time. It was something to help get me out of the house and make sure that I was going to school every day and just like going about my daily routine even though I wasn’t happy with the weather outside so another thing is I had like some pretty interesting roommates so last year around this time as well so anything that could get me out of the house was like good for me so that is exactly why.”

Emily, Cindy, Kelsie, Molly and Kathy described exercise as therapy which support's Maltby & Day's (2001) findings that a benefit of exercise is the reduction of stress and depression. All of the women interviewed have reported an increase in self-esteem which also supports the conclusions from Maltby & Day's study (2001). Markland and Ingledew's (1997) findings that intrinsic motives for exercise lead to the release of the stress and a better psychological well-being is also supported by Emily, Cindy and Kelsie's testimonials.

#### *Exercise as Preparation for a Future Event*

Not all of the women interviewed found their exercise motivation as a response to an event such as a break-up. Some of the women explained that they began exercising in preparation for an important up-coming event in their lives such as a wedding. American media places heavy emphasis on women looking slender and fit, especially on a day that has been narrated by American culture to be one of the most important days in a woman's life that she looks forward to from childhood. It is very common in media to see articles about losing weight for that special wedding day. Both Lisa and April found themselves exercising in preparation for their upcoming weddings, something that has been socialized in American culture. Lisa stated,

“I had been engaged and I knew that I would want to; honestly what I said was I knew I wanted wedding dress arms. That was really what I wanted to get toned arms for the wedding dress...and they are now, it was honestly like the push of getting married and when I was going to go on a honeymoon and I didn't own a swimsuit at the time. My friend was really active in the gym and I just knew that with having the guidance of her would really help and it did... I would say definitely the wedding and then the push from Amy like she would not leave me alone, so ya it was definitely the wedding honestly I don't think it had anything

to do with feeling healthy or getting healthy and now I don't know how I ever had that mindset.”

Lisa explained her motivation to get what she called “wedding dress arms,” proceeding to explain that she wanted her arms to look toned for her wedding day. She also mentioned that she didn't own a swimsuit, alluding to her self-image issues. Though Lisa was relatively vague, the common theme of her interview was the urge to be smaller, having smaller arms, being smaller to fit into her wedding dress, and being smaller to feel better in a swimsuit. April, much like Lisa was also motivated to get fit for her upcoming wedding. April and Lisa's motivations to exercise for appearance fall into extrinsic motivations according to Markland & Ingledew (1997). Though April later stated that she is motivated to exercise for health reasons (intrinsic motivation), the motivation of her upcoming wedding to exercise was mentioned consistently within her interview.

“Right now my motivation is slightly higher than it has been before because since I am about to get engaged and I am going to have like a wedding dress fitting coming up and I know I want to look a certain way on my wedding day, um so I am trying to get in shape now before my wedding dress fitting.”

April states that she wants to look “a certain way” on her wedding day, stating also that she wants to get in shape for her wedding day. April is explaining the concept that the American culture pressures women to become thin and look their best on their wedding day. April and Lisa's upcoming event motivations are linked to extrinsic motivations such as appearance for their wedding. April and Lisa both explained that they have periods of time in which they cease exercise due to time or motivation, therefore having only short-term extrinsic motivation as Markland and Ingledew found in their study (1997). Amy explained that she also initially began exercising due to extrinsic motivations,



“I remember when I first started... I complained and I hated my body and I felt so uncomfortable in my own skin, and I just, I hated it so every day I would complain and I would tell myself ok I am going to start dieting, I am going to eat healthier, I am going to work out. I would do it for about a week and then I would stop. I just couldn’t stick with it and finally it just clicked, it was like I want to change and if I want to change I have to be consistent and if I really want to be happy, I have to do this for myself. So I just did it.”

Eventually Amy’s initial extrinsic motivation became internalized over time, leading to an intrinsic motivation as Maltby and Day concluded in their study (2001). When Amy had been exercising routinely her body changed dramatically, and she found confidence in it. She began competing in fitness competitions and frequently finds herself preparing for these events.

“I do fitness or bikini competitions for NPC, which is the National Physical Committee. Basically what I do is I train for about 8 weeks before a show and then I get on stage in my little sparkly bikini and my super dark tan and I have little pose offs with other girls...In off season, I will allow myself to just take the day off but during my training that is not an option. I make time.”

Like Amy, Kelsie also prepares for athletic events. She was preparing for an upcoming race at the time of her interview. One of her motivations to run was to condition herself for that race, to get her body into the shape it needed to be in to perform for the race, 13.1 miles. “Right now I am running ‘cause I am training for a race, but I usually do a combination of cardio and weight lifting.”

### *Internalizing fitness motivations*

Both Amy and Kelsie have internalized their fitness motivations and remain consistent with their exercise as well as healthy eating habits. They have both stressed their commitment to maintaining a healthy lifestyle throughout their interviews. Most of the respondents have mentioned they exercise in order to benefit themselves in their

future, having an intrinsic motivation. Kelsie explained her concern for her lifetime health,

“I think that it is just something that came about as you get older and start to think about your future and what you want your health to be like when you get older and so just understanding the importance of exercising and maintaining a healthy lifestyle so that as you do age you stay healthy.”

Cindy’s motivations are for her health rather than her physical appearance. She explains that although the immediate benefits of exercising are important to her, the long-term benefits outweigh the short-term.

“There are people that smoke and there is not any consequence right now but then obviously later there are and down the road there is. I view it [smoking] like health is the same way and exercise is the same way. It is like you can kind of benefit from it now by looking better and being healthy, but it is really going to pay off down the road when you are not having as many issues. It is like an investment.”

Cindy views exercise as an investment in her future health. Though it may take time, money and effort now, she believes it will save her all of those things in the future by avoiding any health related issues that could be due to poor physical health. Amy, Kelsie and Cindy show that their motivations are intrinsic; therefore they should maintain their exercise habits for the long-term.

### *Constraints for Women*

Many women in this study explained that they felt constrained when it comes to exercising due to the amount of time they have available in any given day. This reflects Gottschalk’s (1999) finding of speed culture being important to Americans. Americans

live a fast paced life. When they are hungry they can go through a fast food drive through and quickly eat, instead of cooking. If Americans want a tan they do not have to lie outside for hours, they can enter a tanning booth, or spray tan to get that instant gratification (Vannini and McCright, 2004). With busy schedules and the time commitment fitness takes many women find it difficult to balance their daily commitments while finding time to exercise.

### *Managing time to exercise*

Making the time commitment for exercise is an issue for every woman who was interviewed. There is a consensus that the most inhibiting factor for women to exercise is finding time to do so. As Cindy was explaining her time investment in her future health, she manages her time by multi-tasking while she is at the gym. She previously stated that she uses the gym as a social time, and she tends to bring her homework with her to the gym and work on it while she uses the stationary bike to make time to get her priorities of school and exercise in. She also re-arranges her preferred schedule in order to make time for exercise. Cindy stated,

“you only have so much time in a day, got to do your homework, gotta go to school, gotta go to work, gotta spend time with your partner and then you know so something has to go.”

Miranda also talked about multitasking by doing homework at the gym. She states that she makes a very detailed spreadsheet schedule and uses her verbal commitments to her roommate as a motivation to complete the workouts she planned to do.

“When I schedule things, when I plan ahead of time, know what’s going on. If it's an elliptical day I can read, I can't read and run, I get motion sickness. My roommate, the body builder will ask when I'm working out and I tell her and I hold myself to it because I told her I was going to work out.”

Lauren also explained the importance of making a schedule and sticking to it. She finds that if she allows herself to stray from the schedule some things will not get done, therefore she commits to the schedule that she creates and finds it easier to stick to her planned exercise commitments. Lauren explains,

“Schedule, its pure time, finding time to work out... I am doing another marathon this summer. But until then it is nice having a set schedule to work out. You can plan around it. It helps me to be more consistent. With a scheduled [exercise] class, it allows yourself to not be variable. When you allow yourself to be variable “Of course I can stay late and do this.”, now I can say no, I have a class that starts at this time. I have to go. No I am meeting my friend to run. This helps with that.”

Emily also made similar comments about balancing her work, school and personal life. April explained the stress that she feels when trying to manage her time and priorities using a schedule to deal with school and exercise, she explains,

“Managing my time has been mostly just to change my priorities. I am changing my priorities cause like I always go to my work out on Tuesday and Thursday no matter what, before... I would be sitting there studying and I would be like I just don't have time I need to use this hour to write this paper, and I found now that my priorities have changed and I just go to the gym instead of whatever it is.”

Three of the respondents are mothers, Kelsie, Lisa and Tina. Kelsie explains the difficulties of managing her time between work, exercise, and being a single mother. Her parents live in the same city as she does; making it somewhat easier to take personal time to go to the gym, but that also causes her stress.

“I think time is a big factor, like for finding time to exercise, working and being a mom. Sometimes you know if I have to have my mom or dad watch my son while I go to the gym or go for a run or whatever, I kind of feel guilty.”

Similar to Kelsie, Lisa and Tina find it difficult to exercise due to their roles as mothers. Both Tina and Lisa are in long-term cohabitating relationship with the father of their child. Lisa explains that she will leave work early, have her husband pick up their son from school, or exercise very early in the morning to get her work outs in. Tina is a stay at home mother. She makes the time to exercise around her daughter’s schedule.

Tina stated,

“Since I am a stay at home mom, when she takes her naps... I will run up and down the stairs, whatever I can do to get my exercise in so... sometimes if she is crabby, then she won’t take naps you know... it doesn’t give me time because she wants to have fun and play all the time, but at the same time I use her for umm, exercising too like when I do my squats I use her as a weight cause she is 20 pounds, You know it saves me money too, keeps her occupied.”

Similar to Tina, Amy describes that she fits her exercise in around her ever-changing work schedule, though she does not have any children.

“I work my schedule around my life or I work my gym schedule around my life. So if I have to work 11-2 and then 5-9 I will go between or you know just whenever I can fit in two hours well probably three hours cause got to shower and everything.”

The seemingly biggest constraint that every woman in this study has been facing is that of managing their time. Exercise takes time and commitment for these women. The concept of speed culture is supported by these statements as the women are on the go and it is difficult for them to find time for exercise. To deal with this they use schedules and supportive people in their life for assistance. At this time in their lives they are so

busy with obligations such as school, work, children, relationships, and many other tasks. Finding time to fit in a workout can be difficult and stressful, though these women make it a priority in order to make it happen.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In conclusion, this study both supports and refutes previous studies on women's fitness and body image. In regards to women comparing their bodies to others, most of the women interviewed stated that media images do not affect them at this point in their lives, though their ideas on their body image seem to refute these statements. A few of the women admitted these images affected them during their adolescence, though they currently look toward their peers for self-comparisons. They view peers as having more realistic and attainable bodies than media images of celebrities and draw more realistic body expectations for themselves from those comparisons. This finding supports that of Krones et. al (2005) who found that women experienced a higher body dissatisfaction when looking at a photo of an attractive peer than when looking at that of an attractive model, suggesting that peers play a more central role in body comparisons than that of celebrities. Many of the women expressed the understanding that their bodies can be molded to an extent; though their genetics play a key role in the amount they can change their bodies. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory is supported in that women prefer to evaluate themselves based on similar others versus celebrities, as there is no objective criterion to evaluate oneself against due to beauty being subjective and culturally created.

The findings in this study are inconsistent with previous finding on racial differences in body image (Boyd et. al 2011, Milkie 1999, Lovejoy 2001). The four African American respondents did not view their body any more positively than did the white respondents. Nor did the white respondents express being more concerned with media images. I theorize that this finding is based on the social class of the respondents versus their race as most of the women in this study are current college students, and those who are not current students already have a college degree. These findings support Boyd et. al's (2011) assertion that higher status women are more susceptible to media images if these respondents' master status is based on that of the education/ socio-economic status rather than their racial status. Another explanation for this finding might be that the African American respondents in this study associate themselves more closely with white culture than traditional African American culture, due to their friend groups or mixed race upbringing.

Respondents described the motivation they felt through exercising with others, whether it was their friends at the gym, strangers in a fitness class, or strangers at the gym. They also viewed exercise partners as a contributing factor to the development of good exercise habits because they made them feel accountable to someone. Significant others play a key role in the exercise habits of women. Many of the women have shared the positive motivation they get from their relationship and support of their partner exercising with them. Other women have stated they began exercising after a break-up and found it to be therapeutic as well as a way of building their self-esteem. Like the respondents in Markland and Ingldew's (1997) study, many of the women in the present

study recognized intrinsic motivations to exercise such as stress management, enjoyment, or challenge lead to the release of their stress.

An interesting and unexpected finding shows that some of these respondents view males as fitness experts. Many of the women expressed the need for guidance and instruction in the gym, specifically by a male. The phenomenon of women viewing males as fitness 'experts' could be due to their concerns of being evaluated by men in the gym, the notion that exercise is a masculine activity, and a view of the gym as a male dominated public space (Gill 2005, Schilling 1993, Salvatore & Marecek 2010).

Women in this study have described both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for exercise pertaining to preparing for upcoming events. Some of the women explained their desire to look attractive in their wedding dress. According to Markland and Ingledew (1997), their motivations were extrinsic leading to stress for the individual. Though the women preparing for their weddings by attempting to change their bodies did not explicitly mention feeling stress, they did talk about the pressure and rush they felt to accomplish their goals, which could possibly lead to heightened feelings of stress. The woman motivated to compete in a fitness competition also experienced this stress as motivation through competition is extrinsic, she exercises to meet her goal for a competition and then takes long breaks in her exercise habits when not preparing for a competition. The same pattern can be seen for the women preparing for marathons who train and then take time off in between races.

The most common statement made by every participant was the difficulty in finding time to exercise. These women have commitments such as school, work, children and social



lives. Finding a balance of time and prioritizing these responsibilities is not easy. All of the women in this study have busy lives and lack the resources that someone of a higher socio-economic status has to make time to exercise. The most difficult aspect of exercising for these women was not the physical strain of the exercise, but the time strain of trying to fit exercise into their already busy schedules. The women who consistently exercise also make it their top priority, re-arranging their schedules or relying on others to help with their other responsibilities. Asking for help from others is difficult for many respondents, especially those with children.

I theorize that for a woman to make time for herself is a difficult decision to make. In the patriarchal society that we live in, women are expected to be caring and to put others first, especially their children. Asking for help with tasks that are traditionally gendered can be difficult as it left many of the mothers with feelings of guilt. For these women to be able to maintain their exercise regimes they have to make time to focus on themselves, something that is culturally taboo, and explains why every woman in this study mentioned the time constraints they feel when it comes to exercising.

#### *Implications for Women's Exercise and Health*

Much research has been done on women's body image in relation to the media. One of the most interesting findings of this study suggests that women compare their bodies to their peers more so than to media images. Therefore many of the women in this study denied the effects of the media on their own body image because they mostly believed the "real" women around them affected their body concepts. This is interesting as the media and American culture does play a large role in the construction of women's

body images, but this role is less visible to them and likely impacts them subconsciously. Gillen & Lefkowitz (2006) found that women holding traditional gendered ideas internalized the cultural body ideal that the media images portray whereas women with more feminist, non-traditional gender ideas were able to reject more of the cultural messages and form their own perceptions of their body.

These findings suggest that the women interviewed for this study who spoke negatively about their bodies hold a more traditional gender ideology, while those who were more comfortable with their bodies may accept non-traditional gender roles. Therefore, women may find that if they explore non-traditional gender ideologies they will be more comfortable with their bodies. Also women that understand the ways that media affect them; even the most subtle ways, may find themselves having a higher level of body satisfaction due to the understanding of beauty being socially constructed. Becoming more cognizant of the social phenomenon may help to alter women's fitness motivations from trying to look a certain way (extrinsic motivation) to trying to look or feel how they want to (intrinsic motivation), leading to continued regular exercise.

Many of the women interviewed clearly defined their definition of an ideal body as not just thin, but specifically, toned. This repeated statement is supported by the research of Bordo (1993), which found that since the 1980's women's focus on becoming thin has shifted to a focus on control. Women are constantly avoiding the "jiggle," as not having control over one's body is seen as having a lower-class status due to moral qualities. This came up in many interviews, using words such as "toned", "tight", or describing those who aren't toned as "skinny-fat," which is a negative judgment about

another woman. The paradigm of what American culture defines as attractive is slowly shifting from that of being thin to that of being fit. The women in this study reflected how this idea is becoming popular with young women. The urge to look toned versus thin to be attractive may motivate more women to exercise as this look cannot be obtained in the ways that the 'skinny' look can be (such as dieting or eating disorders). I theorize that more women will be affected by this paradigm change and American culture will continue to focus more on being fit than thin.

Possibly the most important finding in this study is the way that relationships affect women and in turn affect their exercise habits. This statement is supported by the research of Chodorow (1999), which found that women's sense of self is situated in their relationship with others. Chodorow's research also explains why the women in this study brought up their genetics in explaining their bodies, as women situate their bodies in terms of their relationship with their families, attributing their shape to their family genetics. Many women work out in groups to be held accountable. This is helpful to know for women wanting to begin a fitness regime, that having support from friends is one way to maintain their exercise routines. Making a schedule and having someone to hold oneself accountable was mentioned by many women as a way to maintain an exercise regime.

Romantic relationships also affect women's exercise habits. Many women begin new exercise routines due to beginning a relationship and wanting to share an interest, while others begin their fitness routines as a reaction to the ending of a romantic relationship. Much of these women saw exercise after a break-up as therapy, though this

could signify an activity to replace the time spent with the previous significant other, which is specifically focused on bettering the individual. The women beginning exercise routines after a breakup were able to focus on themselves without the guilt of neglecting a loved one. By focusing on themselves they were able to boost their self-esteem as well as shape their body to meet their body ideal, leading to the reduction of stress. The motivation to exercise after a break-up can begin as an extrinsic motivation and then become internalized for some women, though for others their extrinsic motivations may be the only type they feel, leading to a possible lull or ending of their exercise routines.

#### *Future Research*

The possibilities for future research on the topic of women and their relationship with fitness are unlimited. One angle that I would like to examine more in-depth is the relationship that women have with their bodies just before their wedding day. Many of the women that have been in this situation stressed the importance of losing weight to fit into their wedding dress versus buying a wedding dress to fit their current size. The relationship with the media's effects on how a woman should appear on their wedding day has been internalized by many American women. Exploring the concept of women's body image surrounding their wedding day which has been sensationalized throughout the media would add further to research in women's fitness.

Other future research could focus on the relationship that women have with their body on the bases of their socialization by their family. The concept of family affecting a women's self-image was one that appeared in multiple interviews, without being

questioned about. A more in-depth study could focus on the way women view their bodies in relation to their relatives, or their upbringing.

Future research should focus on the point in time when a woman's extrinsic exercise motivations become intrinsic. It is easy to understand extrinsic motivations to exercise such as appearance, recognition, competition or affiliation in a culture which emphasizes that women need to be thin and toned (Markland and Ingledew 1997; Tiggeman and Williamson 2000; McDonald & Thompson 1992; Brown and Graham 2008; Bordo 1993; Vannini and McCright 2004). Understanding how some women make fitness a life-long choice and how that choice was made will help other women be able to do the same. This research could also benefit women's health as exercise is proven to reduce the risks of many major health concerns.

In line with research to understand how some women continue to regularly exercise, research is needed that explains why women who begin exercising regularly end up ceasing their routines. Understanding why some women do not continue exercising regularly would give women the "do's and don'ts" according to their fitness goals.

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## Appendix I

## Participant Statistics

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Relationship Status</b>
Amy	25	AA/White	Yes	No	Single
April	24	AA/White	Yes	No	Engaged
Miranda	21	White	Yes	No	Single
Emily	22	White	Yes	No	LTR
Molly	21	White	Yes	No	LTR
Kathy	19	AA	Yes	No	Single
Kelsie	25	White	No	Yes	Single
Lauren	25	White	No	No	Single
Lisa	25	AA	No	Yes	Married
Cindy	23	White	Yes	No	Single
Tina	22	White	Yes	Yes	LTR

\*AA- African American \*LTR- Long-term Relationship

## Appendix II

## Semi-Structured Interview Guide

- Cover Informed Consent Form Information
- Personal information
  - Age?
  - Occupation?
  - Single/Married/Children?
- Current exercise habits? (Where/With who/When/How)
- Exercise practices over the past year?
- Why do you exercise? (Health/ Figure)
- When did you begin exercising regularly?
  - What was occurring in your life at that point in time?
  - What motivated you to begin?
    - Have those motivations changed over time?
- Have you ever ceased exercising regularly? Why/Why not?
  - Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to exercise regularly?
- What does your ideal body look like?
  - Are you currently happy with your body?
  - Do you find the more you exercise the better you feel about yourself?
  - What would you like to improve?
    - Do you set goals to accomplish? What do you do to obtain your ideal body?
    - Do media images play a role in your ideal body?
      - Do you find that you compare yourself to people in the media?
      - Do you find that you compare yourself to peers?
        - If so, where does this primarily occur?
- Thank you, Additional Questions/Concerns?

## Appendix III

### **Informed Consent Form**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato; Department of Sociology**

Primary Investigator: Vicki Hunter

Title of Thesis project: Moved to Move: Socially Contextualizing Women's Exercise Choices

September 16, 2013 IRB #: 505087-2

#### **Purpose/Process of Study**

The purpose of this research is to understand what motivates women to exercise and what may be stopping women who have previously exercised from continuing to do so. I will be interviewing 10-15 women individually. Participation will take roughly one hour of your time. During that hour I will inquire about your ideas regarding exercise in general, your exercise habits, your perceptions of how exercise fits within the context of your everyday life, and your personal exercise goals. The interview will be audio recorded using a digital recording device. I will then transcribe the interview. The transcribed interview will comprise the data for my thesis project.

#### **Foreseeable Risks**

There is no cost to participate in this research. The risks you will encounter as a participant in this research are not more than experienced in your everyday life. It is possible that participants may experience slight emotional discomfort while responding to some of the questions regarding exercise, but likely not more than is experienced in everyday life.

#### **Potential Benefits of the Research Study**

There are no direct benefits or compensation to participants of this study.

#### **Protection of Confidentiality**

To protect the privacy of participants, pseudonyms will be used in place of participants' names when transcribing interviews. Any other identifying information (for example, street names or children's names) will also be changed during the transcription process to protect the identities of participants.

The audio recording of the interview will be destroyed as soon as the transcription process is completed (around 2 weeks from the time of the interview). Until that time it will remain in my possession, kept in a password-protected computer file. Electronic files of interview transcripts will also be kept in a password-protected computer file on my computer.

Consent forms will only be accessible to my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Vicki Hunter (contact information provided below) and me. Consent forms will be stored separately from interview transcripts in Dr. Vicki Hunter's locked filing cabinet in her office on the MSU, Mankato campus for a period of 3 years. After that time, consent forms will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation**

The participation in the study is completely voluntary. If you decide to dismiss yourself from the research study at any time up to the completion of the interview; you can do so by simply telling me that you would like to do so. You can also decline to answer any specific question you are asked. Also, if you withdraw your participation no consequences will occur, including any that could affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. Withdrawing still assures your protection of confidentiality.

**Contact information**

If any questions or concerns arise before, during, or after the research study, please contact me at (507) 215-1170 or by email at [dusti.werner@mnsu.edu](mailto:dusti.werner@mnsu.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Vicki Hunter, at (507) 389-5611 or by email, [vicki.hunter@mnsu.edu](mailto:vicki.hunter@mnsu.edu). In addition, you may contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 389-2321 or [barry.ries@mnsu.edu](mailto:barry.ries@mnsu.edu) with any questions about research with human participants at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

**Consent**

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study and I agree to allow the interviewer to audio record the interview. I have been given a copy of this consent form. I am at least 18 years of age.

Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_