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Hot or Not: the Reality of Body Image Perceptions in the 21st Century for Female College Students

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Hot or Not: the Reality of Body Image Perceptions in the 21st Century for Female College

Students

An Honors College Project Thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Work

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

Honors Scholar

by

Raychel Duncan

May 2017

This Project Thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Honors College of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for this distinction

HONORS SCHOLAR

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Abstract

Everyone looks in the mirror at some point in their lives, and they do not feel fully satisfied with what they see. Maybe it is their weight or their hair color or perhaps their height—there is always something that "needs" to be changed. College-age women seem especially impacted by negative body image perceptions. Research shows that this desire to look like and be something different is often brought on from societal pressures, social media and familial opinions and comments. The existing research often looks at why women are dissatisfied with their looks but not routinely at what specific impacts this dissatisfaction has on their daily lives. This study looked at the body image perceptions of 65 female college students from a private, southwestern university to see how they felt their body image has impacted various areas of their lives. A survey that utilized open-ended questions sought to gain a better and more descriptive understanding of how college women truly feel about their body image. The resulting qualitative data was analyzed, and results showed that negative body image impacted the respondents' self-esteem and self-perception. Results also showed that these negative body perceptions had a major impact on how the participants function in their social and daily lives. A full review of this study's findings in relation to the existing literature will be discussed.

Introduction to Body Image

Body image, self-esteem, and the fear of not being good enough, are issues that a majority of people face throughout their lifetime. These fears and insecurities impact many aspects of a person's life from their relationships with their families, interactions among friend groups and possible romantic relationships that will arise as they continue to grow. Body image perceptions are major forces that impact one's life and relationships; at the same time it is these same relationships that have immense impacts on how one perceives their own body.

Literature Review

What is Body Image?

Body image is a multidimensional mental process focused on the way one physically looks (Cash, 2004), or how one feels about their perceptions of themselves. Body image is an aspect of life that everyone encounters at some point or another; it interacts with and affects other factors of life too. For example, body image and self-esteem many times are seen working with each other. Self-esteem can be first defined as how a person feels they are viewed or perceived by others, and secondly, how said person feels about themselves in meaningful areas of their life (Harter, 1990). Many times body image perceptions interact with the first component of self-esteem; the way that someone believes they are perceived has a massive impact on how they perceive themselves and how they act around others.

How Do Negative Body Image Perceptions Arise?

Social anxiety stems from one having low self-esteem; it is defined as fear of being social due to possible negative critiques from peers causing a fear of vulnerability

(Hinrichsen, Wright, Waller, & Meyer, 2003). This type of anxiety can come in two forms, a physical form and an appearance form. The first, social physique anxiety is about one's physical health and composition, while the other is about one's analysis of their outward appearance (White & Warren, 2014); both forms of anxiety can stem from negative body image perceptions or low self-esteem.

So much of society today contributes to social anxiety; it is said that women are more likely to feel objectified sexually and therefore vulnerable in society (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The media also promotes a made up ideal of what the "perfect body" is for the female population that young women feel they must live up to and has been shown to increase body dissatisfaction (Bell & Dittmar, 2011). These women have begun to accept this media representation as a true reality to try and achieve (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008), and allowed it to bleed into their own thoughts regarding their sexual and bodily functions, specifically in reference to their menstrual cycles. Some researchers found that the shame that some women associate with their period relates to an overall negative body image, and even lessens chances of physical intimacy during their cycle each month (Wiederman M. W., 2002). Modern society has led women to believe that a biological process that is out of their control is something to be ashamed of and to be suffered in silence.

Negative body image perceptions are issues that can be experienced throughout the length of one's life; however, research has shown that college-age women deal with this issue more consistently, and generally feel as if they weigh more than they actually do (Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999), most likely because of the societal pressures that they face every day. When asked to choose an ideal body type many college women chose a

body type that was extremely muscular and would take copious amounts of exercise to achieve (Lenart, Bailey, Goldberg, Dallal, & Koff, 1995). It has also been reported that when women appreciate their bodies, it increases their chances of well-being psychologically, such as self-esteem and life satisfaction (Iannantuono & Tylka, 2012).

Impact of Family and Friends

  Families and body image. Body image perceptions can begin at a young age, and much of one's familial relationships influence what kind of body image perceptions one will have. Research has shown that support from family members has a massive impact on having a positive body image (Snapp, Hensley-Choate, & Ryu, 2012). Those who grow up with proper emotional development, support systems and communication skills (Snapp et al., 2012) are more likely to have a positive perception of their body image in the future and are more likely to carry on that way of thinking to their children. Some researchers have explored the opposite end as well, and their results showed that families with negative connections showed a greater instance of maternal modeling on their daughters' body image, as well as the way they eat (Kichler & Crowther, 2001). This shows that not only does one's family impact their body perception, but the ways they react to it as well. Familial remarks are some of the defining moments for one's development of their body image perception while they are growing up. They carry this perception on into adulthood, which, if negative, can have an impact on the emergence of other issues such as eating disorders.

  Friends and body image. So much of a friend group's dynamic and how one chooses who their friends are seem to pertain to body image, especially for females. Because of the importance of having attractive friends on social media (Perloff, 2014), so

much of how one incorporates oneself into a friend group is based off of the physical appearance of the other members. Also with social media, it has been said that young women satisfy their need for validation by comparing their pictures on Instagram to pictures of friends that they deem less attractive (Perloff, 2014). Social media has become the platform that young women use to validate themselves, and if someone has more likes or comments it decreases their self-worth and makes them perceive themselves in a more negative manner.

Not only do young women compare themselves to others online or through their private thoughts, but research has shown that:

> Groups displaying higher levels of body image concern and weight-loss behaviors (a) reported more talking about weight loss and dieting with their friends, (b) reported comparing their bodies more often with others, (c) reported receiving more teasing from friends about weight and shape, (d) reported friends as being more important in their decisions to diet, and (e) perceived their friends to be more preoccupied with dieting and weight loss. (Paxton, Schutz, Wertheim, & Muir, 1999)

It has become common in today's society to constantly discuss and compare body types and for like minded and those similar in appearance to congregate together.

The friends that one surrounds oneself with has a major impact on their lifestyle; it is said that attitudes from friends and peers has a significant impact on the prediction of one's individual body image (Paxton et al., 1999), as well as attitudes towards other peers' appearances. This being said, not all friendship circles instigate negative body image perceptions. Many people who have high social interactions and good friend

support systems are more likely to have high self-esteem (Kong & You, 2013), leading to more postivie perceptions of oneself, less likelihood of low life satisfaction and lower risk of eating disorders.

Body Image and Romantic Relationships

Commonly viewed as one of the most influential factors to body image perceptions for young women are their romantic relationships; women's body image is a major factor before, during, and after relationships have taken place. In one study, some female participants stated that their partners gave meaningful comments about their weight in both negative and positive ways; some also said that their partners had compared them to other women physically, also in positive and negative ways (Goldsmith & Byers, 2016). Because of society's current idea of the perfect body type, men's comments and society's standards seem to work together to develop poor body image perceptions among women (Woertman & Brink, 2012).

These stigmas pointed at the female population by potential partners have horrifying impacts to a woman's self-esteem and body image perceptions. Because of society's ideal that all women should be "unrealistically thin" (Bell & Dittmar, 2011), fuller-bodied women, and anyone else not deemed normal by society, are at a greater risk to be stigmatized (Crandall, 1994), and lose opportunities to find relationships with heterosexual partners. This worldwide method of "fat-shaming" and "body-shaming" anyone who does not fit society's model of the "perfect body" is a major catalyst for the social anxiety defined earlier. This anxiety leads to women electing not to go to social functions or places where they could be stared at and inspected by men (Wiederman & Hurst, 1998), which almost guarantees that relationships will not be formed.

Studies focusing on freshman female college students show that they may become more self-conscious because of continuing to compare themselves to their peers, and because of an increased need to find a romantic partner (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2006). This comparative model of looking at peers greatly increases negative thoughts of one's own body because there will always be something that needs to be changed or someone that they believe is more attractive than they are.

Beyond dating and the initial steps in the relationship process, research has shown that negative body image perceptions generally become more prevalent during sexual activities (Weaver & Byers, 2006). This finding, combined with the implications of negative body image perceptions, leads to growing statistics of females who are self-conscious, uncomfortable and nervous during intercourse with their partner. One study stated that females who were more self-conscious about their breasts were more likely to try and keep themselves covered during sexual activity with a partner (Wiederman M. W., 2002). An act that is meant to bring about partner intimacy and connection has now become a nerve-inducing act of trying to bring pleasure to one's partner while keeping their body covered because of the fear and hatred they feel for their body.

Romantic relationships and sexual interactions are no longer based on multiple facets of one's personality, attitude and appearance. Because of modern day societal stigmas and focus on body appearance only people deemed attractive generally have higher rates of sexual experience; having had greater sexual experience was a factor in achieving a more positive view of oneself (Wiederman M. W., 2002). A person's own self-worth seems to stem solely from their perception of their appearance, and how they believe that they are viewed in society. Body image has become one of the deciding

factors in a person's romantic life and sometimes, is the sole basis one uses when

determining if they are good enough, or attractive enough, to be in a relationship.

Purpose of Study

This research study aims to answer the question: How does the way you perceive

yourself impact your life?

Methodology

Design: This research is a phenomenological qualitative study done through open-ended survey responses and groupings of common themes.

Data: The data will show what ways a female college student's perception of their body image impacts their day to day life and what factors from their life impact their body image perception.

Data Collection Procedures: Data was collected through a survey given through SurveyMonkey. The link for the survey was sent out amongst ACU Facebook pages, ACU student emails, ACU faculty who sent the survey on to more ACU students, and the ACU Honor's College who put the link to the survey in their newsletter.

Participants: The research sample will be done through a volunteer sampling method. Participants must first agree to take the survey and complete the survey in its entirety before their data would be used for the total analysis.

Instruments: Instruments used were SurveyMonkey, Facebok, ACU email servers and ACU faculty members.

Data Analysis: After data is collected from SurveyMonkey, researchers will take away any responses provided from male participants and participants who are not ACU students. The remaining data will be grouped together with common themes that develop from the responses to the survey questions.

Results

Survey responses came from 65 ACU female college students from a variety of demographics. Participants came from a variety of ethnicities and were between the ages of 17 and 41 years of age. Also, the participants all came from a mix of upper, middle and lower classes of economic status. Many of the participants were from Texas with only a few participants from other states, or even other countries. Despite this range of demographics, the results of the surveys still showcased some common themes in how body image impacted these students in their day to day lives and what factors in their lives further impacted the way that they view their bodies.

How College Females Define Body Image

Before delving into how body image impacts female college students, the researchers of this study first wanted to determine what female college students defined as "body image." Results from the survey showed the common definition for body image is how one "perceives" or "feels" about their body. Participants expanded on this idea to describe how this perception can stem from negative stigmas from society and from inferred negative perceptions from other friends and peers.

Some of the females who participated in this survey also discussed how their body image perceptions were displayed through negative thoughts about their own bodies which led to body confidence issues. One respondent stated that she defines body image as "how someone looks at their body. When [she] first looked at the question though, the first thing that popped into [her] head was fat girls looking at themselves in the mirror and crying." Many responses discussed how one's body image perception can be boiled down to weight and how fat someone thinks that they are.

Participants stated how these perceptions are not always the reality of one's true body image, but are based more on how they think they look and how they do not have the "perfect body" according to society which can lead to low self-esteem. They also kept in mind that body image can vary among different people because everyone's bodies are different. Ultimately the definition of body image obtained from participants was a perception of self and the way that each individual person perceived they looked and fit into the society around them.

Personal Thoughts on One's Own Body Image

By far one of the most repeated topics throughout the survey responses was about how much of one's body image perception stemmed from their own inner thoughts and comparing themselves to other people. Many participants discussed feeling "self-conscious" and "insecure" about their bodies; they talked about how it affected them throughout the day, in class and at home. One participant stated that when she has days where she does not eat healthy or does not work out that she feels "self-disgust" and "guilty" because she had done something wrong. Some participants divulged their feelings of depression that stemmed from the way they looked at their body image. Overall, many of the comments described negative feelings about the way that the participants viewed their bodies and how thinking these negative thoughts about their body image was a direct hit to their self-esteem.

Aside from feeling self-conscious about their body image, multiple women discussed the ways that they compare themselves to those around them and how these comparisons also impact how they view their body image. Participants verbalized how comparing themselves to others causes further negativity to impede their own body

image. One response discussed how the participant often compares herself to others which led to her trying to eat better and get more exercise; however she said that she "gives up because [she] never sees results." Other responses talked about how the participants compare themselves to people beyond their peers; they compare themselves to celebrities, models and even fictional characters. Some participants talked about how when they compare themselves to others, they end up changing the way that they are standing or sitting in order to make themselves feel less self-conscious.

Body judgment. From these thoughts and comparisons emerges another issue associated with body image: body judgment. Several women who participated in the survey talked about how they negatively judged their bodies and how they "couldn't pull off" certain clothes because they were not skinny enough. They talked about feeling "sad," "angry" and "embarrassed" on days when they were not confident in how their body looked compared to others. Other themes noticed were how body judgment and negative body image were part of a "vicious cycle" which led to participants living in a constant state of "defeat," as if trying to find positives in how they looked was a "battle" that they had to fight every day.

Outside Thoughts on One's Body Image

Another substantial factor that influences one's body image perception is the thoughts and perceptions that come from other people. According to participants, these thoughts, or assumed thoughts, and perceptions constantly play through one's mind and impact how they view themselves and even actions that they take in their lives. One participant stated that she does "not want to eat thinking it'll make [her] feel better emotionally even though it wrecks [her] physically;" another said that she was "overly

paranoid about [people] judging [her] for [her] body." Both, and others, continued to enforce the idea of a continuous thought process throughout their daily lives.

Participants discussed thoughts leading to lower self-esteem and more self-conscious actions on a day to day basis. They stated that when judged by others, they feel "inferior" and "not worth dating." One mentioned that in order to not be thought of as a "fat slob," she would pull in her abdominal muscles to appear thinner. This action was taken whenever the participant felt self-conscious in her own body and in front of others.

On the other hand, some participants who are more confident in their body image said that their confidence came, in part, from the perceptions of other people. These participants talked about how others often flirted with them "because of [their] thin figure" which led to them having more confidence in their looks and more confidence in themselves as a whole. Many of the participants said that the reason that their body image perception fluctuates is because they generally base these thoughts on how others perceive them on that particular day.

Societal Impacts on Body Image

Another major factor of life that participants said impacted their personal body image were many of the 21st century social stigmas that they face in their society today.

The "perfect body." When asked to describe what they thought society deemed as the "perfect body," participants had a myriad of responses. Some of the repeated ideals about the "perfect body" were: "skinny," "thin," "no fat on body," "Barbie," "tanned" and someone who is a "fit person." One participant took it a step further and went into detail about the societal stigmas aimed at women and discussed how society makes

women feel as if they need to be "starved and airbrushed." Another stated that women need to be so thin that their ribs should to be visible. Another idea mentioned was that having the "perfect body" did not matter unless you "show it off" or unless "every guy wants you." Coming off of this idea was a comment stating that to be "perfect" one had to be "thick in sexual places," yet still thin throughout the rest of one's body, or else no man would want them.

Contrasting to these ideas was the thought that today's society is "moving towards a broad acceptance of all bodies" and that the "perfect body" is becoming a more inclusive idea. However, other participants mentioned that this was just an idea projected by society and is not actually followed through with.

By far one of the most provoking ideas mentioned about society's "perfect body" is that it is "unrealistic." Many participants stated that the "perfect" body type is "unattainable" and a "paradox" that is being "taken to unrealistic heights." This was a constant theme throughout the survey with almost every participant mentioning that there was something about their body that they wished they could change in order to fit that societal ideal.

Social media. According to the survey responses, the emergence of social media in the 21st century has had a heavy impact on body image. Many participants stated that social media makes them feel "not good enough" and "inferior" compared to the "half-naked women selling some product or idea." They also stated that the women on social media come off as perfect and that they feel that their "imperfections are ugly and wrong;" hence, some participants refrained from projecting themselves on any social media sites.

Some participants once again brought up the idea of "unrealistic" expectations of body image. They discussed how social media is pushing these expectations onto people at a much younger age now and how these expectations cannot be achieved because of how edited and photo shopped the pictures are. Also, on social media is the hope for as many "likes" as possible. One response stated that the participant feels "confident about [her] looks or discouraged based on the amount of likes/comments [she] receives." Another participant discussed how social media affected her, as she is both black and white; she said that "being seen as beautiful seems like a pointless uphill battle" because there is no one on social media that she feels looks like her.

A specific social media site that was mentioned multiple times was Pinterest; participants said that it was "depressing" to look at the site because of the models that made them feel insecure and uncomfortable with their bodies. One participant in particular stated that she refrains from "social media to not let it affect [her] body image." Another social media site mentioned in a negative context was Instagram.

With all of the negative comments about social media and body image, there were some responses that viewed social media in a more positive light. One participant stated that she now looks at social media in the form of "a motivator, as a way of improving [herself], and as a way of finding likeminded individuals." Additionally, a participant talked about how society is now including more Plus Size models on social media; she likes this inclusion "because it offers a different viewpoint to this nation." The common factor to having positive body image from social media came from the people that the participants were following on the sites. Some participants followed blogs that promoted

health and positive body imaging which in turn helped them to feel more positive about themselves.

Safety. Another way in which the female participants' body image perceptions impacted their lives was in regards to their personal safety. Many participants discussed how it felt to be stared at by "gawking" males and how they do not "go out alone when it is dark or when there aren't many people nearby" because they do not want to be considered "easy prey" and be taken advantage of. One woman said that "it feels like [her] surroundings are a zoo by the way men look at [her] or [her] friends."

Aside from the dangers presented by society and the opposite sex, survey responses showed that participants' perceptions of their body image also caused the participants to self-harm. A few participants stated that they would skip meals because of their feelings of "self-hatred" and that they would exercise more than they should, while eating much less in order to lose weight. One participant was even hospitalized because of "negative reactions" to her personal body image. Both societal safety concerns and self-harming actions are severely impacted by body image and the ongoing mental cycle that accompanies one's body image perception.

Familial Impacts on Body Image

There was a wide variety in responses when discussing familial impacts on body image. Some participants discussed the positive impact that their family has had on their body image; they said that their families always made them feel beautiful and "enough." One participant also said that her parents taught her that "everyone is unique especially with body types and that there is no such thing as a perfect body." Another talked about how her mom moved past her own parent's negative impact on her body image, and

made a point to always make the participant feel beautiful and confident. Comments were also made that described parents instilling the thought to participants that they are "perfect" just the way they are.

For some participants, even though their family attempted to increase their confidence and self-esteem with body image, the participants were unable to believe them. Participants felt that their family was "obligated" as to say things like that, and that it was what they were "supposed to do." The participants could not accept being called "beautiful."

Despite many participants saying that their family has had a positive impact on their body image, a majority of participants said the exact opposite. Those participants that discussed their family having a negative impact on their body image had a wide range of reasons as to why. Some participants said that their parents have called them "fat" and made "sharp comments or rude remarks," overall "criticizing" participants because of how they look. Others said that their families' own "struggles with overeating and being overweight" caused them to focus more on their own weight and their own "fatness." These negative feelings turned into an "obsession" for some, especially if they are not as "physically fit as [their] other family members." One particular participant stated that her mom is "super healthy," and even though they are the same weight, she feels "insecure" because she feels like "[she] should be smaller than [her mom]." Another discussed how she and her family are all very tall individuals, and while she feels comfortable with her family, she feels "very out of place at school or in public" because of girls who are shorter than her. One participant stated that she judges herself "the way [her] mother judges herself," showing that body image can be a generational issue.

How Body Image Impacts Relationships Outside of the Family

Many participants talked about how their body image impacted the friends that they had or the romantic relationships that they involved themselves in. A few described how they "isolated" themselves from their friends because of their lack of confidence in their looks; one even referred to herself as "the ugly duckling." Participants also talked about feeling that the people they were romantically interested in were "out of [their] league," and if they do get in a relationship that they can be "insecure about [their] body, which can be annoying" for a partner. They also mentioned that they felt as if their significant others found it a "chore" to be with them because they are not "desirable enough" and are therefore not worth being with.

In terms of friendships, participants talked about actions they would take in order to better fit in with their friends. One said that she "changed [her] appearance sometimes to match [her] friends who look better." Another mentioned that she would "end up settling for friendships and relationships instead of seeking out beneficial and equal ones." Another brought back the idea of skipping meals, stating that she "used to not eat in front of people even [her] closest friends because [she] didn't want them thinking [she] was fat." This negative trend carried overwhelmingly throughout the survey responses from the question regarding social relationships and body image.

Although a majority of comments were negative, there were a few participants who discussed how their relationships actually stemmed from a more positive view of body image. One participant said that she tries to "surround [herself] with people who have a healthy view of their body and food to help remind [her] eating cupcakes occasionally is okay." Another participant stated that her "friends are not judgmental of

what [she] looks like, and [they] are always very encouraging to each other." These comments show the positive side of body image in relationships compared to the negative.

Discussion

Barriers because of Body Image

All of the data and research comes down to one conclusion: body image does have an impact on one's day to day life. Granted, throughout the responses there were both positive and negative comments; overwhelmingly however, a greater amount of the responses depicted a negative impact to one's life because of the way they perceived their body image. One of the final survey questions helps to further back up this conclusion: Has your body image ever stopped you from doing anything? If yes, in what ways?

The most repeated answer from participants for this question was that they felt inhibited from going swimming because of their body image. So many of them stated how they were ashamed or afraid to do something as simple as wearing a swimsuit to go swimming with friends. From here the responses escalated. Participants' responses included aspects such as not wearing cute clothes because they did not look good in them, refusing to dance with their friends, not participating in talent shows or sports and even attempting to not be in pictures with their friends because they were so "self-conscious" of how they looked.

Responses continued to increase in intensity. Some participants said that they would "literally turn away" and go home if they saw their reflection in a window; others said that it even deterred them from "trying out [to be] an acting major." One participant who was married stated that her body image interfered with "having sex with [her]

husband because [she] feels like [she] looks like 'the bride of Frankenstein.'" Even

worse, body image prevented some participants from leaving their house, stopped them

from eating and led to them starting an eating disorder. One participant was "almost

hospitalized for negative responses to [her] lack of a positive body image."

Having a negative body image perception created barriers in every aspect of life

for some participants, be it personal, academic, physical, etc. Results showed how

dangerous it can become to view oneself in such a negative way. Results also showcased

how body image perceptions do not solely come from one's own personal thoughts; body

image is impacted by countless factors in one's life such as familial, peer and societal

stigmas on a massive scale.

Without Barriers, What Could Happen?

All of these negative impacts affect a college female's day to day life. Without

these impacts and the barriers caused by body image, what could happen? The survey

ended with this final question with the purpose of showing why any body image research

is so important. Participants were asked what they would and could do if they felt that

they were already "enough" and the responses were amazing. The words "fearless,"

"powerhouse" and "confident" were used to depict the strength these women wished to

possess but were unable to because of their body image. Participants stated that they

would go for the career of their dreams, and help others learn that they too were

"enough."

Body image is important because it impacts everyone, it is a never ending cycle

plaguing our society today and dragging down those who are not confident in themselves.

A society without this problem could birth a new nation of leaders preaching acceptance

and worthiness of every member of a population. One participant summed up this question very easily, when asked what she could do if she felt that she was enough she simply stated, "I could do anything." This is a statement that applies to everyone; think about what the world could be if everyone believed it.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this research study. First and foremost, body image is a delicate topic to discuss. The delicacy of the topic put the participants at risk of slight emotional turmoil which was why all participants had the option to drop out of the study at any time if they chose. This risk was discussed and approved of by the IRB at Abilene Christian University.

A second risk to this study is that it relied on honesty from the participants. The researchers have no way to know if the participants were completely honest in their responses, or if they provided all information needed for each question. Because of this, results cannot be considered universal to all other body image studies.

Another limitation is that this study was done purely with students from Abilene Christian University and is therefore an extremely homogenous sample. Because of the lack of diversity among participants there is major room for expansion of the study to other universities that might provide a more broad range of responses.

Lastly, the survey used in this study was created by the researchers so it is lacking validity. In order to have results that were considered valid, researchers could have used a survey already created and in other research studies.

Areas of Future Study

Many of the studies found and consulted for this study focused on how one's body image affects eating habits and risk of eating disorders. It would be interesting to research how a female's body image perception impacts the way that she lives her everyday life and certain factors of safety along with that. Also emerging today as a national issue has been the vast amount of female sexual assaults on college campuses; a

possible area for further research could be how a female's body image influences the way that they think about their safety along with their bodies.

Another area for future research could be a more in depth study surrounding specific familial relationships and their impact on a child's body image. Studies observed in this study focused on maternal modeling. A further study could focus more on the entire familial unit and how comments made or lifestyles observed impact a child's body image as they grow up. Further research on all of these topics could be used to back up and correlate with the results obtained from this particular study.

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Appendix A: Body Image Perceptions Survey

Survey Questions

1. What do you think of when you think "body image"?

2. How does your perception of your body image affect you? Think mentally, physically and emotionally.

3. Has your body image ever stopped you from doing something? If yes, in what ways?

4. What if you felt like you were already enough, in every sense of the word, what could you accomplish, what would you set out to do?

5. If female: In what ways has your body image made you more aware of your surroundings?

6. If male: What events have you faced that forced you to look at your body image in a new way? That made you more aware of your body image?

7. What ways has your body image affected your social life? Has it affected the friends you hang out with? Your dating life? If so in what ways?

8. In what ways has your family impacted your perception of your body image?

9. What do you think modern day society perceives as the "perfect body type"?

10. In what ways has social media, and the growth of that industry, affected your perception of your body image?

Demographic Questions

1. Male or Female?

2. Age?

3. Race/Ethnicity?

4. Where are you from?

5. Economic Status growing up? – poverty, lower middle, middle, upper middle class, upper class.

Appendix B: Selection of Survey Responses

- I let it stop me from trying out being an acting major. I thought I was simply too tall and therefore would always be an "awkward" actor on stage. I also find that I don't let myself enjoy myself as much as I could. I eat less dessert, not because I'm trying to exercise moderation but because I'm trying to control my body.

- When I was younger I refused to do sports because I didn't think I had the right body type for it.

- I hate wearing anything that doesn't cover my shoulders or stomach. Both have fatty parts and I feel ugly if they're showing. When there's some sort of physical activity, I usually say no. I'm self-conscious about how terrible I probably am at sports and how people judge me for how I look.

- Yes, in the past I was almost hospitalized for negative responses to my lack of a positive body image.

- For sure, I will be walking into the campus center and see my reflection in the mirror and literally turn away and leave back to my dorm or house because I don't want to face people looking how I am.

- Makes me feel like I am worth less than others who look a certain way.

- Social media constantly throws images of the "perfect" body in your face and implies that to live the best life you want to live, you have to look like that super model on the page in front of you. Even if that is ridiculous, that concept can creep into your head until you eventually believe it.

- The media sets the body standards that we envision, as we see photo shopped models on TV or in ads that we want to become. We buy clothes and beauty products to replicate what isn't real.

- Ironically enough, I don't feel comfortable working out because of my weight. However, on the other side I will sometimes refrain from eating extra because I am afraid of being judged as the stereotypical "fat girl". So, I guess in negative ways it is both good and bad.

- That I'm a little far from whatever people on [social media] deem the "perfect look" but I still think I look phenomenal.

- As a black and white woman, it is rare to see anyone who looks like me portrayed as "beautiful". I think this affects me because reality is our world looks to media to define standards and if the standard is something I can physically not be, being seen as beautiful seems like a pointless uphill battle.

- I have had a fair share of negative and positive encounters with body image on the internet. However it is just like my relationships – I have to cut out negativity from my life, refine myself constantly, and choose to see the good in myself and in the world around me. Instead of looking at social media through a lens of comparison, I have begun to look at it as a motivator, as a way of improving myself, and as a way of finding likeminded individuals.

- Going swimming with friends or going to a party. I'm like the ugly duckling in the group. I close myself off so I don't date much. People perceive me as mean or isolated.

- I think in terms of dating life, I've probably abstained from going for the guys that I think are physically "out of my league".

- It is hard to say which came first. I gained more weight and viewed myself more harshly after a worsening spell of clinical depression hit, or I gained weight and through worsening hormones and chemicals from unhealthy eating habits clinical depression hit harder. Do I view myself poorly because of depression or did depression develop from viewing myself poorly in the first place? I could probably elaborate on this but I am incredibly tired and probably not making any sense.

- I used to not eat in front of people even my closest friends because I didn't want them thinking I'm fat. It's a terrible thought but I dealt with it for years. Starving myself and missing out on food because of fear of how others will see my body image affected my social life immensely and who I hang out with. As far as dating, you'll never believe what the guy says even if he actually means it, and for me, my perception of how I am has ruined most relationships because I literally can't believe that they actually want me.

- Mentally, it changes the way I think of my value.

- I am short and thin, so I know better than to allow myself to venture out alone when there is the potential for danger. For example, I am very careful not to go out alone when it is dark or when there aren't many people nearby.

- If you have a poor perception of your body image, then you will be less assertive in social situations, you will walk, talk, and think less confidently, and you may not get as many social pleasures out of certain situations.

- It makes me choose my clothes differently than I would without the surgical scars.

- The perfect body type is tall, thin, with an ass.

- I have been catcalled, stared at, so whenever I go out at night, I am on high alert that people may think that my skinny body, white skin, or simply my female body is easy prey to take advantage of me.

- I feel like I'm not pretty. Sometimes it will hit me at random times during the day, and it will trigger a mood swing of depression. Other times, I know I look bad from the moment I wake up and then it overshadows my day with negative feelings and insecurity. I am also at times hostile when I think I am looking very bad.

- I'll talk about the US in particular, and the "west" more generally, because that's my experience. For women, it's a skinny, white, able bodied, femme, large breasted, toned woman with long hair, large eyes, a big butt, and long legs. This ideal woman also essentially has zero body fat. She's basically starved and airbrushed. She isn't real. Even toned down versions of her are still poisonous and unrealistic expectations for most women. For men, it's a tall, hyper-masculine, over-muscled, tanned white dude with perfect teeth. He looks like he has no fat on him and works out all the time. There's nothing feminine about him.

- I think of the movement to liberate people from misconceptions about how their physical appearance should be, and persuade them to choose to love their own bodies as they are.

- Modern day society perceives many "perfect" body types, but I would not classify myself under any of them.

- Various diets and exercises, eating disorders, unrealistic models, unhealthy girls and guys who strive for the perfect body, which is ludicrous, negative media over the subject, people stepping up to change how women and men see themselves.

- For women, I think society says you don't have a perfect body type until every guy wants you.

- "Body image" makes me think of the way I see my body in relation to society's standards of beauty, and I think of the ways my body fits or does not fit those standards.

- Extremely skinny. You have to have to be so small you show off your ribs a little and your hip bones and your thighs can't be touching. Think Victoria Secret…that's "the perfect body".

- In literally every way and every sense of the word. As a female we constantly worry about what people think, especially guys, and weather this dress makes me look fat, or personally for me, do my thighs jiggle too much? Is everyone noticing the way my arms just jiggled? Can they see my thighs jiggle? Now I have to walk a certain way so they don't think I'm a fat slob tripping over her own fat. These are just some of the thoughts I have in public. Also weather my stomach is sticking out too much even though I barely weigh 120 and I know I'm not obese but it is still a constant worry and I've literally trained myself to natural pull in my stomach so It doesn't stick out over my pants or anything.

- Mentally, I'm constantly worried about how my body looks and how others perceive me. Physically, I used to and still do, not want to eat thinking it'll make me feel better emotionally even though it wrecks me physically. When I don't

have a sound perception of my body image, I have very little confidence and it makes me act in irrational ways for fear of how others see me.

- My body makes me more aware of how I dress may be interpreted as something provocative.

- One thing that comes with being overweight, at least for me, is a larger breast size. It is honestly very irritating. On top of already existing anxieties about being objectified and dehumanized, I am constantly conscious of how low my shirt is, or if my bag strap is cutting across, or if my bra is too tight. Concerning others however, I have noticed that I am far less likely to judge. I treat others and do my best to think of others the way I hope others treat and think of me. This includes men who are subject to similar forms of body shaming from society.

- Ugh. This is the worst part of being confident in my body – noticing cat calling, being harassed, and having the self I have worked so hard to become (internally AND externally) objectified. It sucks.

- I sometimes felt like I took up too much space because of my body image.

- Some days my perception of my body is very positive. I am productive and it allows me to do things which makes me feel confident, strong, and happy overall. Other days, it is overwhelmingly negative. This affects me very terribly, because I can feel really depressed and unmotivated to do anything; I sometimes feel like nothing will ever change and this spiral of self-loathing will never end; I often feel like doing nothing and staying home away from people all day. Sometimes that is even what I do. When I feel badly about my body, it often makes me feel

badly about myself and my ability to contribute anything positive to my friends,

my work, and the world.

- We have to be perfect. Imperfections are ugly and wrong.

- My uncle says I look nice when I dress up for church or work. I hate that. I hate

  that males and everyone mostly compliments each other when they are dressed

  up, have makeup on, or really tried. I want to be complimented in shorts and a T-

  shirt so I don't always feel I have to work hard to be liked.

- I need to be pale, tiny as hell, and have short thin hair. Basically look like an

  Asian porn star…

- I struggle a lot with body image. It has caused me over the years to not like what I

  see in the mirror and therefore internalize self-hatred, as well as caused me to

  over exercise and under eat.

Appendix C: Responses about Being "Enough"

- I would want to start a healthy living blog and run a bakery

- I would help the world

- Love others like they are enough

- I would be braver

- I could mostly disregard physical concerns and focus on developing myself as a person, rather than a physical being

- I think I would try any idea that came to mind, without any reservations or apprehensions

- I would probably powerhouse my way through a court room

- Make other people feel like they are enough in every sense of the word

- Be truly and wholly happy

- I would be fearless

- I could set out to accomplish all of my goals, unhindered

- I could do anything I set my mind to

- I would set out to walk into any situation confidently, without insecurities. My white skin color would not limit my ability/credibility to stand up for black people. I would set out to use my privileges to help others

- If I felt like I was enough I feel like I could go out and share those feelings with other girls who struggle to feel worth it

- I wouldn't let societies standards of what they think beauty is stop me because I didn't fit into it and I would try to achieve everything that I wanted to, to be a better individual

- Help my fellow military "brothers and sisters" with their personal struggles

- I would be confident to look people in the eye as I walked down the hall. I could go to the pool and take group pictures without being self-conscious

- I would want to be a speaker/teacher and talk about the problems I think really matter in the world to large groups of people

- I wouldn't hold back, I could be willing to go in front of people to raise awareness for causes that are important to me, and that may help others in the future

- I would go swimming, I would leave the house without makeup, I would pierce my belly button

- If I felt like I was enough, I would accomplish finding love, as cheesy as that sounds. I feel like if I was enough I wouldn't feel so lonely all the time and maybe my accomplishment would be actually feeling appreciated and love

- I would excel at socializing and making new friends, and be able to be in a steady and healthy relationship not sabotaged by my insecurity, I would be able to dress without worrying what other people think, and feel confident in myself and my abilities no matter what

- I'm in psychology because I want to help talk with people and help them through their problems. So I would set out to tell everyone that many other people are self-conscious so just embrace who you are

- I could do anything