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Embodying Identities: De-Essentializing the Body through Ethnic Location

by

Maya Anita Poran

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1999

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract**Embodying Identities: De-Essentializing the Body through Ethnic Location**

by

Maya Anita Poran**Advisor: Professor Michelle Fine**

Through multiple methodologies, the following research investigated Latina, Black and White women's relationships to their bodies and dominant-popular social representations of women. 53 college women participated (19 Latina, 15 Black, and 19 White) in nine focus groups (3 Latina, 3 Black, 3 White). All participants filled out a questionnaire, engaged in focus group discussions, and a drawing activity. Results indicate that Latina, Black and White women in the sample have shared gender-themes in which the body and imagery are perceived, and unique themes by ethnicity through which they respond to these perceptions. All participants shared the general awareness of the body as important for women, and the imagery as presenting a social standard. Latina and Black women, however, tended to question the structures and meanings of social imagery, while White women tended to accept them without question. Although participants differed in their intellectual responses to dominant-popular imagery, all groups discussed the psychological process of social comparison as a major component of their experiences of their bodies. These findings not only contribute to research on body image and ethnic identity, but aid in the reconceptualization of this entire area of study.

Extending acknowledgements to Michelle Fine, Vita Rabinowitz, Colette Daiute, Rhoda Unger, and Ruth Hall for their advisement. Special appreciation to Kerry Dennehy, my family, and friends Donna Foster-Paley and Tracy McFarlane.

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Embodying Identities: De-Essentializing the Body through Ethnic Location

Introduction

The study of the **body**, and attitudes toward the body, has been a major contribution to the social psychological literature. The majority of studies on attitudes toward the body has stemmed from feminist theories which locate the individual within a larger cultural context; that context being one which objectifies and devalues women's bodies, as well as attributes very specific roles and behaviors for women and their care of their physical appearance. The individuals studied within this context, however, have mostly been White women; and the specific social location of White women was not taken into account when findings were generalized to Women of Color. White women were not only considered the prototypical woman, but the social context in which women live has also been understood as a uniform construct, as a dominant way of life which all women respond to and perceive in the same fashion. Now that research which includes Women of Color is being undertaken, it is important to clarify the significance of social location before the present studies, and the logic that is already in place, leads to more misinterpretations and misrepresentations.

Since White women have been the basis for all information on body image research, and White researchers have analyzed the findings, one must take into account the normality of **Whiteness** which has often obscured other theoretical possibilities. In the frame of Whiteness, it is very possible that the studies which include Women of Color will now interpret findings in relation to White women and the theories which previous research generated. Responses of Women of Color are either seen as similar to, or different from, White women, rather than as distinct responses from women with specific lives and social experiences. This type of interpretation can be avoided when one releases the previous assumptions that: 1) White women should be considered the norm, and 2) dominant culture is perceived and experienced the same by all of its members.

The assumption that White women are the norm is bolstered by the fact that the majority of research to date on women has been conducted with White participants. Simply because one group has been studied at greater length than another, and that research comes before research on another group, it does not logically lead to that group standing for the "norm." Although useful to some extent for comparative purposes, previous research on White women can not be used as the "normative yardstick" (Collins, 1991) against which Women of Color are measured.

The assumption that the dominant culture is perceived and experienced the same by all of its members is an assumption maintained by privileged members of the academic and scientific disciplines; it is an assumption which blocks the pursuits of these disciplines by illogically narrowing the foci of research and interpretation. Although one can and should contextualize behavior in relation to larger dominant cultural norms and imperatives, one can not assume that the dominant culture is perceived in the same fashion by all of its members. As White feminists have indicated that the world is a different place for women than for men, so one must understand that the world is often a different place among women. Women are of a variety of ethnicities, sexual orientations, social classes, physical abilities, ages, etc; and these social locations will entail different experiences with and within culture; the experience to be focused on here is that of the body in relation to dominant cultural representations.

Ethnic identity, as a constantly created product and response to the dominant culture, will be presented as one of the main distinctions among women. This paper will discuss the importance of recognizing the social location of ethnicity. Ethnic/racial identity of Latinas and African American women, specifically, will be explored as socially situated identities; these identities will be discussed as fluid and changing, but heavily rooted in the historical origins and experiences of Latinas and African American Women in the U.S. The meanings of beauty and the body will be discussed as both deeply

intertwined, and as diverging from, the meanings of the body which have been gathered from White women.

One's ethnic/racial identity will be posed as related to differing experiences of the body through social comparison processes. Ethnicity as a social category which guides, or frames, certain social comparisons will be discussed. These processes themselves will also be explained as culturally and historically rooted, and variable. It will be argued that the present images of women in popular U.S. culture interact with women's specific ethnic/racial histories and identities through socially located, or generated, psychological processes. In addition, with the understanding of ethnic identity and social images as changeable and interdependent, these processes themselves can be expected to change as the social relationships change. The changing face of media representations, specifically in regard to the presentation of Women of Color, will be examined; and the possible effects of such changing presentations on the experiences of ethnic identity and the body will be discussed.

Framework

This work is a metatheoretical review detailing a more coherent and complex framework through which to understand the diverse experiences women have with their bodies. Experiences of the body will be discussed in relation to social location in culture; specifically, through the experiences of ethnicity and ethnic identity.

The body, the visual cue of our selves to others, predetermines what group(s) one is assigned to. Depending on the social categories to which one is ascribed, one's options, limitations, privileges, and a variety of life experiences will be also be proscribed. One's body is a major contributor to one's social identity and personal identity. Body image research has focused on the social category of gender, and has ignored other lines of identity which are likewise distinguishable on the basis of physical appearance.

Distinctions of ethnicities and races within cultures are major social demarcations based on physical appearance, and so ethnic and racial identities must be included in any discussion

of experiences of the gendered body. Research which indicates differences among women's relationships with their bodies must be analyzed for the meanings of these differences, rather than just presenting "race differences." Ethnic identifications and processes must be understood, not just cataloged.

Physical variation and differences become meaningful in any culture or community which recognizes difference and places individuals in a hierarchy based on physical signifiers. One's identities are not only be shaped through how one is marked, but by how one actively engages in social comparison from one's specific social location. In attempting to include race and ethnicity in the study of the body, however, researchers and scholars often tend to essentialize ethnic groups. The complex interactions of social groups and identities (e.g., gender and race/ethnicity) in relation to dominant cultural messages are then lost in essentialist theorizing and research.

In order to understand women's relationships with their bodies, and the significance of one's ethnic identification in shaping these relationships, the nuances of identity must be explored rather than collapsed. It is here that a discussion of the dominant culture and "sub"cultures must be held. The meanings which are assigned socially to ethnic experience and grouping are often presented as absolute, unchanging, and unified. Such assignations creep into research and often are recreated through research findings. To avoid contributing to the very meanings which shape the questions of research on the body, the dialectic between bodies and cultures must be brought to the fore. Experiences of the body as female are not unified; experiences of the body as "raced" are not unified; therefore, the study of bodily identities cannot be reduced to immutable, essentialist categories. The layered experiences and presentations of the body must be explored, as well as the positioning of bodies within historical moments, contexts, social climates.

Dominant cultural influence, as presented through media imagery, will be presented as a major contributor and shaper of women's identities. The present historical

moment provides a new form of cultural transmission of meaning: the co-optation of "ethnic" images by U.S. media (Hurtado, 1997). The changes in the representations of women and ethnicity do not only reflect, or create, a new face of the dominant culture; but must be viewed as a force which will alter the forms of sub-cultures, relationships to and between the dominant and sub-cultures, and so the experience of the self. It is this historical moment which must be seized as a moment of transformation in research on bodies and body imagery. For each section of this review a quote is offered; these quotes come from young women who participated in a study on perceptions and experiences of the body (Poran, 1997); and indicate a keen and articulate sense of how bodies and cultures intertwine. The body is a significant vantage from which individuals interact with culture, with others, and through which we know ourselves. Bodies, always marked by gender and ethnicity, with all of the intricacies within these categories, must be researched and theorized thoughtfully. This metatheoretical review is presented in order to understand the body in its fullness of identity; to reclaim identities as multiple, layered, and situated; and to recognize the interconnection of persons, groups, and cultures. If our bodies are to be our selves, our research must recognize that our bodies are connected to our worlds.

The Body

Attractiveness Stereotyping

"Beauty is an appearance of a person, their figure, but also the inside beauty...So, to me at first glance it is the way a person looks, but after a while it is the personality and intelligence that define beauty." -- (White student)

Research on the body is one major area of investigation which has stemmed from the social psychological process of contextualizing psychological experiences . Feminist theorists have long critiqued the representations of women in society and the negative effects such images had/have on women's perceptions and experiences of themselves (Bordo, 1990; Chapkis, 1986; Millman, 1980; Wolf, 1992). Social comparison and

identity theories were strongly implied in these critiques, and much research has followed and found not only intense experiences associated with the body, but the contextual influences on body cognitions. This research has provided much information and insight on processes of the body; however, again, the majority of work and theory on the subject has been from a White perspective, with White participants, and has excluded Women of Color and their experiences of their bodies.

Physical appearance and attractiveness is often perceived as an outward expression of internal traits of an individual, and these perceptions then guide interpersonal behavior. The "beautiful-is-good" phenomenon, introduced by Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1972), began a long line of research which investigated the myriad of assumptions based on physical attractiveness. Perceived attractiveness of an individual has been found to be related to perceived internal characteristics such as intelligence, sociability, kindness, virtue, nurturance and warmth, success in work and success in personal life (Dion et al., 1972; Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo, 1991; Feingold, 1992; Fine & Asch, 1988, Karraker & Stern, 1990). Not only is the "beautiful-is-good" response a pervasive and robust phenomenon, but it is available to the mind in 100 milliseconds (Locher, Unger, Sociodade & Wahl, 1993). The physical attractiveness stereotype is present at the earliest stage of social information processing and can, will, effect all interaction following. In addition, the effects of this process are so powerful that they are often unchangeable; in other words, inferences of traits based on appearance are often stronger than any "actual" information on the personality of the target individual.

The beautiful-is-good phenomenon has been found not only among adults, but also occurs in the perceptions of infants. Stephan and Langlois (1984) conducted a study with Mexican-American, Black, and Caucasian infants who were rated by adults on physical attractiveness and traits. Stephan and Langlois found the stereotype prevailed across the ethnic groups studied, and that there were strong and consistent expectations of behavior associated with attractiveness very soon after birth. High attractive babies were also

judged as more likable, smarter, and "better babies" than low attractive babies. Stephan and Langlois believe that this information is valuable in understanding socialization processes based on attractiveness, and propose that babies may be getting differential treatment soon after birth based on their perceived physical attractiveness.

Indeed, it has been found that parents do tend to treat children differently based on levels of attractiveness, with the more attractive children being treated much less harshly (Dion, 1972; Dion, 1974); and this treatment is gendered, with attractive boys being treated with the most leniency (Berkowitz & Frodi, 1979; Dion, 1974; Karraker, Vogel & Lake, 1995; Rubin, et al., 1974). Similar findings have been revealed among teachers (Wilson & Nias, 1976), and on ratings of children's age and competency (Ritter, Casey & Langlois, 1991). These findings indicate not only the strength of the physical attractiveness stereotype on behavior, but also the different meanings for girls and boys, women and men. Girls learn from a very young age that physical appearance is highly significant to their treatment, and grow into women who are influenced to purchase products on the basis of that reality. The information on the beautiful-is-good stereotype offers evidence of assumptions based on physical appearances; however, the meaning of those stereotypes are themselves dependent on context.

Cross-Cultural Meaning

"The predominant standard definition of beauty leaves out the majority of the world." – (Black student) [all following quotes from previous research by Poran, 1997]

Wheeler and Kim (1997) also investigated physical attractiveness perceptions in relation to larger cultural meanings. Their study consisted of 157 students in Korea (79 women, 78 men) who rated 114 photos of other Korean students at three levels of attractiveness. Wheeler and Kim hypothesized that since collectivistic cultures stress harmonious relationships, this context of physical stereotyping would effect the types of traits associated with persons considered to be attractive. Indeed, the stereotyped traits associated with attractiveness were constructed differently than those made in the U.S.; in

addition, the traits were also gendered. Attractive women were most likely to be perceived as socially competent, concerned for others, sexually interested and warm, and less "modest." Attractive men were perceived as more intellectually competent, and having greater integrity. Wheeler and Kim state that attractiveness stereotypes mirror, and vary with, cultural values; and that perceived attractiveness elicits different inferences of traits depending on what traits are valued in a specific culture; what is beautiful, they write, is culturally good (79).

Physical appearance and attractiveness do not hold the same meaning within all cultures. In addition, the construct of what constitutes physical attractiveness is also variable and context dependent. Physical attractiveness itself is something to be questioned, since the physical characteristics associated with beauty and specific character traits are value and meaning laden. Crandall and Martinez (1996) have found that Mexican students are much less concerned with weight, and more accepting of fat, than U.S. students. Crandall and Martinez locate antifat attitudes in the U.S. in relation to the dominant social ideology which holds individuals responsible for life outcomes; and believe that antifat attitudes may derive from these attributions of controllability. In a study of 406 university students from Mexico and the U.S. (no information provided on the race of participants in the U.S. was given) they found a greater dislike, and fear, of fat among U.S. students than Mexican students. American women were found to be the most concerned with their own weight. In addition, Mexican students held lower levels of belief in a just world, higher levels of political liberalism, and showed no relationship whatsoever between antifat attitudes and social ideology. U.S. students, however, showed a relationship between weight and self control attitudes and antifat attitudes and ideology (1170). Interestingly, in both countries, making internal controllable attributions for a persons fatness led to greater rejection; although this tendency was significantly higher in the U.S.

Attributions of responsibility have been found to be central to stigmatization and

prejudice; and antifat attitudes have been found to be associated with political conservatism, belief in a just world, racism, authoritarianism, and the belief that the poor are responsible for their poverty (Crandall, 1994). Crandall and Martinez (1996) point out that there is "no necessary logical connection between the attributions of control and responsibility, and the laying of blame...this connection is based on a variety of cultural assumptions." (1173).

Sobo (1994) discusses rural Jamaicans' attitudes towards fat as being quite different from U.S. attitudes. Sobo explains that fat has more positive connotations among rural Jamaicans, and is considered to be associated with food sharing, sexuality, generosity, social relationships, and health; while thinness is equated with meanness, withholding, not sharing, and ill health (141). Such cross-cultural information on attitudes and processes are important means by which to re-interpret research. Cultural comparisons remind social scientists of their assumptions and ideologies, and caution against confusing ideologies with scientific endeavors (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Ryff, 1987, 1197). Such seemingly obvious measures of attractiveness, or acceptance of what physical beauty is comprised of, are much more complex and rest on a variety of cultural assumptions and values. Also vital are within-culture analyses, and research on the body is slowly moving in that direction. Differences among women in the U.S. are now being explored, and the findings are re-defining and re-formulating previously taken-for-granted conclusions on the body.

Feeling the Body

"...in American culture beauty is a characteristic of women, doesn't much include men; Beauty is a feminine characteristic. Men are not usually referred to as beautiful." -
- (White student)

The experience of the self has been well-documented for White women in the U.S.. It has been consistently found that White women not only tend to focus on their appearance more than White men, but that this focus is also of a different type. In three

national surveys, it was found that White women have substantial levels of body dissatisfaction (Berscheid, Walster & Bohrnsted, 1973; Cash, Winstead & Janda, 1985) and that this dissatisfaction has increased over the last decade (Cash & Henry, 1995). The majority of White women also tend to evaluate their bodies on a part-by-part basis, with 45% having negative feelings about their weight (Cash & Henry, 1995). The responses of White women to their own bodies is also consistent with popular images of White women, which depict the female body as attractive only when slim or skinny. In addition, the cultural fetishization of specific female body parts seems to direct a woman's gaze towards those specific parts.

While White women have been found to focus more on body parts, White men have been found to be more fitness oriented, perceiving their bodies as a "whole" (Cash & Brown, 1989; Franzoi, Kessenich & Sugrue, 1989). White men tend to focus on their bodies-as-process, as whole, instrumental parts of themselves. This is very much in line with stereotypes of women's bodies as ornaments and men's bodies as instruments (Freedman, 1986). Gender roles become embodied and effect perceptions of the self and others.

The relationship of gender roles and body cognitions has been documented. Franzoi (1995) and Davis, Dionne & Lazarus (1996) found that the type of gender orientation an individual holds will effect body cognitions and affect. Women high in masculinity have been found to have more positive attitudes toward their bodies-as-objects than did low masculine women. Interestingly, men who were high in femininity tended to have a more positive attitude towards the body-as-object, while women high in femininity had negative experiences of their bodies. This finding is especially intriguing since the same psychological construct, femininity, operates differently depending on the gender of the individual; this complicates even the defined and measurable construct into something which is context depended, with the context being the gendered individual.

Jackson, Sullivan and Rostker (1988) also found a relationship between gender role and body image among White women and men; with high feminine women viewing physical appearance as much more important than masculine women. Gender role is therefore not only related to body cognitions and attitudes, but even to the import of the body to the self concept. The feminist conviction that women should not be judged on physical appearance (Chernin, 1981; Wolf, 1992) has been found to be significantly related to enhanced body satisfaction (Dionne, Davis, Fox & Gurevich, 1995). In other words, women who understand the body through a feminist perspective tend to have higher body esteem than those who do not.

Gender roles have also been connected with eating disorders among White women. Johnson and Petrie (1995) found that women without gender discrepancies -- women who have little to no difference between real and ideal perceptions of their masculinity and femininity -- report fewer anorexic and bulimic symptoms, and less concern with body shape and size -- than those who are discrepant. In addition, they have higher self-esteem. In Johnson and Petrie's study, of those who had no gender discrepancy, 80% were either androgynous or masculine in gender orientation. This finding adds to the above, indicating that the feminine gender role is not necessarily healthy for women.

Other stereotypical feminine characteristics have been associated with the eating disorder Bulimia (Martz, Handly & Eisler, 1995); and low autonomy and self-esteem, other "gender-appropriate" characteristics for women, have also been found to be strongly related to eating disorders (Frederick & Grow, 1996). Eating disorders, as well as negative body perceptions, attitudes and stereotypes, are also highly gendered, with 90% of all eating disorders being found among women (APA, 1994), especially adolescent women (Pike, 1995).

Weightlessness

"If there are any females that have these physical attributes then you are 'beautiful.' Intelligence is not impt, The same applies to men. But men, are a bit luckier

because if you are intelligent you are also considered attractive. Those are the breaks huh!" -- (Latina student)

"I guess everyone has their own meaning for beauty." -- (Latina student)

Gender has been the main social category, or physical demarcation, which has been studied in regard to body imagery. The fact that the majority of the research on gendered attractiveness has focused on White women's perceptions of themselves, and White men's perceptions of White women, should lead to a deeper critique of how gender roles and stereotypes operate among diverse groups of women. Assumptions of what attractiveness means, and how attractiveness is situated within gender prescriptions, may not be applicable to Women of Color since gender roles often hold different meanings within the category of "woman."

The physical attractiveness stereotype has been proposed (Bar-Tal & Saxe, 1976; Deaux & Lewis, 1983) to be a component of larger gender stereotypes, rather than a singular construct associated with appearance only. Deaux and Lewis (1984) found that physical appearance is the dominant component of gender stereotyping, and consistently implicates other components of the gender stereotype. Deaux and Lewis conclude that people tend to rely heavily on physical appearance cues to make inferences about other aspects of a person (1003). With the knowledge that the beautiful-is-good phenomenon operates differently in relation to the larger social context (Wheeler & Kim, 1997), one can extend Deaux and Lewis' finding into a theory which includes the possibility that women of diverse ethnic groups will experience the larger social context differently in terms of appearance. In addition, with the knowledge that measurable psychological constructs -- such as femininity -- can be experienced differently in relation to an individual's social category, one can also propose that the gender stereotype for women may be experienced differently depending on the ethnicity of the individual. Although pertinent to the study of attractiveness and gender, the category of gender itself must be

investigated for the different manifestations and expectations of the role among Women of Color.

Gender stereotypes must be viewed as differing by race and ethnicity. As will be discussed, many stereotypes which exist for the "feminine stereotype." are actually components of the White feminine stereotype; and do not necessarily mirror the stereotypes, nor experiences, of Women of Color. In the majority of research dedicated to body image and attractiveness, the findings regarding femininity and body satisfaction -- specifically weight dissatisfaction -- have been based on information from White participants and White researchers. The relative absence of research with Women of Color has left unexplored the various and complex experiences of the female body. Although previous theorists proposed that the devaluation of behaviors associated with race by the dominant culture lead women of color to react against these stereotypes by adapting to the White standards (Root, 1990); Black women have thus far been found to respond quite positively in regard to body satisfaction, are much more comfortable with their own bodies, their weight, and have different standards and understandings of what it means to be beautiful.

Beauty, as defined through White feminine gender imperatives, does not hold the same meaning for all women. As physical attractiveness perceptions and meanings are context dependent, so are the stereotypical characterizations of feminine beauty. Parker et al (1995) conducted a study with African American, Asian, Mexican American and White female high school students. Using an ethnographic method they found striking differences between African American and White adolescents' conceptions of, and experiences with, beauty. White females' conceptions of beauty tended to be very rigid, fixed and uniform, while the African American females' conceptions were much more fluid and flexible. Black teens' perceptions of what the word "beauty" means revolved mostly around personality traits and a personal sense of style, not a certain "look." Over 63% of the African American teen-women in the study believed that beauty meant having the right

"attitude" and personality. In addition, the African American females were much more likely to be satisfied with their weight and appearance than the White females: 70% of the African-American participants were satisfied with their weight, while 90% of the White participants were dissatisfied.

Landrine, Klonoff and Brown-Collins (1992) also report differences between Black and White women's definitions of descriptive words such as "attractive" and "feminine." For the definition of the word "feminine," Black and White women believed it was a combination of physical appearance and character traits, but the Black participants were much more likely than White participants to define it as traits alone. This information perhaps provides insight to the different experiences of the feminine stereotype, and different consequences for its meaning. The construct of femininity, then, also becomes more fluid than previously conceived.

Sub-Standard

"The blond hair blue eye example of so called beauty is not beautiful to me. As an African American I am not just saying this speaking as a neutral person. If we are referring to features I feel the Afro-American woman is more natural looking. I prefer having the broader nose and nostrils that I can breathe easier through. The kinkier hair because I can do more stuff with it. These thicker lips because it looks better but this is just my opinion." -- (Black student)

"In my culture a beautiful woman is usually heavy breasted, small waisted and big butted. The guitar shaped women as they call them." -- (Latina student)

The reasoning behind these differences among women has often been based on information which makes evident the divergent "sub" cultural environments in which women live. Wilson and Russell (1996) discuss the greater acceptance of larger bodies by African American women and relate these attitudes to traditional African society and the associations of size with wealth, health, prosperity and fertility (97). Community support and relationships to other females have been theorized to be a contributor to Black

women's higher acceptance of their bodies. The families and communities in the Parker et al. study were found to support the participants' present appearances, styles, and also appreciated a fuller physique than the White participants'; and this positive feedback has been theorized to greatly enhance the Black teens' self-esteem. In addition, the feminine gender role stereotypes, or standards, for women's bodies have been found to differ among Black and White men.

There is evidence for different preferences and standards among Black and White men in the U.S. Thompson, Sargent and Kemper (1996) studied 496 adolescent boys (159 Black, 337 White) and found that Black males were more likely to prefer significantly heavier body sizes for females than White males did; in addition, Black males were more likely to believe that their parents and male and female friends would also prefer heavier builds for females than White males did. Specific body parts, hips, buttocks and thighs in particular, were also found to be larger in the preferences of Black males than Whites. Thompson et al. state that this may be indicative of different standards within "Black culture."

Jackson and McGill (1996) also studied body preferences and found that African American men preferred larger bodies for women, and associated more favorable character traits with largeness than White men did. Black and White males both stated that "good skin/complexion," a nice smile, and a pretty face was important for a woman to be attractive; however, on the weight dimensions Black men not only preferred larger women, but attributed positive characteristics such as "generous" to larger women, while White males were more likely to attribute characteristics such as "lazy" and "uneducated" to larger women. Jackson and McGill also propose that there may be different race-prototypic standards for body attractiveness which would account for these differences. Importantly, this is not only a different standard *by* race, but *for* gender. In other words, there are standards of beauty for both Black and White men's perceptions of Black and White women, and the inferred characteristics of what is considered to be an attractive

woman; therefore, gender stereotypes for attractiveness not only *mean* differently, but are *operating* differently.

Harris (1995) explains that few studies present body image as multidimensional, multifaceted constructs; rather they are presented as unidimensional, adding up body parts and believing those parts hold the same meaning for all. In her study of 90 African American women, she found that racial identity attitudes were strongly related to body satisfaction; and that women who either held pro-Black attitudes, or were presently moving away from identifying with White norms, held positive body cognitions especially related to health (Harris, 1994; Harris, 1995); and states that cultural assimilation has been found to be related to dietary restraint, the drive for thinness, and fear of fat (Harris, 1995, p.142). Appearance evaluations have been found to be related to familial, personal, and sociocultural variables, and so can not be viewed as a unitary construct which remains stable or holds the same meanings for all (Harris, 1995).

Immediate and meaningful community environments will effect the meanings of group affiliations and self-perceptions. For example, although the White adolescents in the Parker et al. study reported dieting as a strategy to establish group affiliation, they also reported comparing themselves to other White females and consequently feeling negative about themselves and other teen-women. This act of comparing was associated with a sense of competition among these participants. Nichter and Vuckovic (1994), in a longitudinal study of 300 8th and 9th grade girls (73% Caucasian, 16% Hispanic, 11% Asian and African American), also found such responses in their study of "fat talk." "Fat talk" was found to be prevalent among White girls across social groups, and this type of talk centered on issues of closeness, absolving guilt, and group affiliation. African American girls, however, have been found to discuss bodies in a very different manner.

Parker et al (1995) found that the African American participants reported having very supportive relationships with other teen-women, and that these relationships were not based on comparison and competition. This information on the comparison processes

stated by these young women indicate differences in the participants' experiences of their peer groups; and how those comparisons, in relation to familial and community environments, may shape and influence their experiences of their bodies. Previous assumptions on the pure physicality of beauty, and the meanings of beauty among women, have been complicated by these different experiences and definitions of beauty; and the fact these perceptions are integrally related to experience of the dominant culture.

Poran (1997), in a study of Latina, Black and White college women, found that the majority of women (54.10%) defined beauty as a combination of personality traits and physical characteristics; and 30.60% defined beauty as personality traits alone. There was also a tendency for participants to distinguish internal and external types of beauty. These responses were evenly distributed by race; however, when asked to discuss the perception of cultural standards of beauty, interesting differences emerged. Black women (50.00%) were the most likely to mention Whiteness as an important part of the cultural standard; Latina women (20.83%) mentioned Whiteness; and only a very small percentage of White participants mentioned race as part of the standard (5.88%). Black women in this sample also had much more positive experiences of their bodies than Latinas and White women; with Latina women having the lowest scores.

Beauty and ethnicity, as socially constructed categories, must be reconceptualized as not only related, but as part of a larger process of categorization, cultural meaning, and reproduction. Harris (1995) explains that Black women's acceptance of, and preference for, larger bodies have been attributed to subcultural norms, different standards (130); and this theory is a popular one. One of the problems with such a theory is that it often implies a standard and fixed subculture, or cultural identity, instead of one that locates ethnic groups and meanings in relation to other groups and meanings. There is indeed evidence for the existence of other standards of beauty among African Americans, however, the relationship of this standard to the dominant standard must also be explored.

Consequentially Speaking

The standard of beauty is, "A White woman with Blonde Hair, Blue eyes big breasts and very Thin. For African Americans - A healthy size - not too skinny nor too fat very light Skinned Black Women with long Hair medium Size breasts (Optimal) and a large behind. However This is Changing - Thank god!" -- (Black student)

Although differences in perceptions of weight have been located within the U.S. among female populations, it must also be remembered that even if there is a preference of larger bodies, there are still consequences for such a standard. To begin, it is a standard. Standards imply "not meeting them." In addition, being large has been found to be strongly related to economic status, and can result in the exclusion from jobs, social events outside of the workplace, promotions, and denied visibility in important work-related activities, i.e. conferences (Faulker, 1995, 278). Even if one prefers a larger size, the dominant U.S. culture does not; therefore, one may still be subject to weight discrimination. Wilson and Russell (1996) point out that there is a reduction in earning potential for obese women, and that the current ideas that Socioeconomic status influences obesity -- with those of lower SES more likely to be very "over"weight or obese -- may actually be the fact that being "over"weight itself can lower one's economic status due to discrimination against large women (101). In addition, the more financially secure one is, the more able one is to purchase beauty and so recreate the stigmatization of heavy people.

Physical cues can indicate many aspects of a person, such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, physical disability or ability, age, manner of dress and so on. These "projections" of the self are processed and responded to in a very short time; and will influence the treatment one receives from others. In addition, these physical presentations can be altered, within the range of cultural allowances and physical possibilities. Complex rituals of physical presentation, ornamentation, and body maintenance are engaged in every day by every individual; every individual is engaging in a social act through self-representation.

The rituals themselves are so deeply imbedded in cultural practice and hegemonic habit, that their significance often goes unnoticed, and their political bases and implications become obscured.

Some aspects of the physical individual are relatively easily altered, for example, hair length, style and color, dress, and even eye color. Height can be manipulated with high heels or shoe inserts. Body hair can be grown or shaved. These are all physical characteristics that can be altered and presented to the world by the choice of the individual; yet for some reason all of these choices move towards the norm, the cultural ideals of attractiveness. Such choices, even the very existence of such options, are often misinterpreted to be a totally controllable aspect of the self; however, these presentations will be judged by others. The knowledge of other's judgements may themselves guide, or frame, the types of self presentations one chooses. The body itself, therefore, cannot be separated from culture, social interactions, and social meanings of physical appearance.

Other physical characteristics are not so easy to control or change, such as skin color, gender, visual signs of physical disability, facial features, and weight. These characteristics, however, are also now somewhat alterable with the presence of a multi-billion dollar industry which is dedicated to "helping" people change these aspects of themselves: skin color can be altered to some extent (tanning, chemical lighteners), physically disabled and/or "disfigured" persons can choose from a variety of aesthetically pleasing prosthetics, devices and aids, plastic surgery can alter one's basic features, diet industries can "help" people lose weight, and even one's "sex" can be altered. The consumer society in which these "choices" exist, this shopping mentality of the self, creates the impression that the individual is free to construct the self in any way they choose, and so de-politicizes the social meaning of appearance. Such choices are and must be political, since an individual's choice of self-alteration and presentation is highly effected by cultural preferences and meanings associated with the body.

The ability to change one's physical appearance through surgical procedures has become more accepted, commonplace, and a sanctioned method for individuals to cope with the social expectations of attractiveness. The use of such procedures are also gendered, with the majority of patients being women. Plastic surgery, initially used for health reasons or serious physical deformities (usually war-related injuries), has now become a way for women to reconstruct their healthy bodies. Plastic surgery is a three hundred million dollar per year industry in which the patients are 90% women (Davis, 1995, 21). Although there are some men who do change their physical appearance through surgery, the majority of such procedures for men are hair transplants. Women, on the other hand, undergo procedures such as breast augmentation. In other words, the surgeries themselves are gendered, re-creating the body to fit the socially expected presentation of what it means to be female or male; altering the body to fit more neatly within the cultural standards for each gender and race.

Races in Faces

"...if you don't fit those model the Stores are fill with things you could be you should change everything from your eyes color to the hair and even nose. If still one is not happy one can really use a plastic sergion." -- (Latina student)

The sexism of the plastic surgery industry is quite obvious, for it re-creates sexist standards of attractiveness. Racism in plastic surgery, however, has not been widely discussed or critiqued. To begin, the types of surgeries requested by women mostly are those that will change the body in relation to the larger cultural standard, i.e. thin European looking noses, high cheekbones, etc. In addition, plastic surgery that Women of Color engage in also seem to focus on this White standard. Kaw (1994) discusses the fact that White women and Women of Color seek different surgeries, and that this search is often stripped of it's political significance in the discourse of "choice." (243). Chinese women, Kaw states, have learned to think of their eyes as "small, slanty, " indicating being

passive, dull, unenergetic and unsociable (248). The surgery of choice for these women is for eye alteration, to cut open the lids to get rounder eyes.

Kaw explains that the majority of women with whom she spoke believed that this was a simple personal choice, unrelated to social standards and racism, although they did see it as something that would aid them in occupational and economic success (253-256). The dominant consumer culture provides an environment in which needs and wants seem to "pop up spontaneously without any social reason or pattern." (245); and personal choice is equated with personal empowerment. Therefore, similar acts (such as Whites getting tans and Blacks lightening their skin) are viewed as qualitatively the same, a matter of choice, unconnected to power, social location, and racist cultural contexts (260-262).

The alteration of faces, then, also becomes a matter of personal choice, unrelated to political meaning. Much research has been dedicated to the face as one of the main signifiers of attractiveness. The focus of this work has been on gendered meanings of the face, and analyses regarding race and ethnicity have gone unexamined. The baby-face phenomenon, mostly of interest to biological/evolutionary psychologists, has been presented as an evolutionary manifestation which is indicative of reproductive fitness: the face is believed to project information (beautiful truly is good), rather than having information projected on to the face. Faces are viewed as symbols of fitness which serve adaptation and heterosexual mate selection purposes (Buss, 1988; Cunningham, 1986; Cunningham, Barbee & Pike, 1990; Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen & Wu, 1995; De Kay & Buss, 1992). The majority of research dedicated to the baby-face, however, is immersed in a variety of assumptions which are inherently sexist, heterosexist and racist. In addition, the majority of studies completed to date have utilized White male participants who evaluated White female targets (Cunningham, 1986).

The facial characteristics associated with the baby-face include large eyes, a short chin, and a variety of facial "symmetries." These have been proposed to be socially related to gender roles rather than inherent feminine attractiveness (Zebrowitz & Montepare,

1992). Indeed, the facial characteristics associated with baby-facedness seem to pull on stereotypical White feminine characteristics; baby-faced adults (women or men) are perceived as more socially dependent, intellectually naive, physically weaker, honest and warmer than mature-faced people (Zebrowitz & Montepare, 1992, 1147). Other attributions of the baby-faced person were: affectionate, desirous of being hugged, kinder, more straightforward, dependent, submissive, easily fooled, less likely to know right from wrong, physically weaker, and less able to follow complicated instructions (1150). The physical characteristics associated with baby-facedness differed slightly for women and men, however, the effects were the same. Baby-facedness seems to be highly associated with the White feminine stereotype, and is interpreted through heterosexist and racist theories.

Interpretations by evolutionary psychologists have focused on the adaptive purpose of such faces; with most theories revolving around mate selection, that baby-faced women elicit a "take care of me" response which makes them appealing to men. The "purpose" of physical characteristics, the notion that inherent physical features mean something and communicate that meaning, is a dangerous interpretation. Such interpretations of baby-faces focus on women being sexual signifiers for men simply because they have a face; in addition, homosexual relationships are ignored in such an analysis; and, although no studies have been found dealing with this specifically, it can be presumed that the majority of the research has been by and for White men, and further investigation may lead to the uncovering of racist assumptions in these interpretations. For example, if large eyes and neonate features are indicative of reproductive fitness, how do the Asian women in Kaw's research fit in? Is it possible for an Asian woman to have features indicating the beauty of the baby-faced? How would they "measure up" on the scales? Racist assumptions and interpretations of such research, especially when presented as being part of a natural evolutionary process -- while in actuality can only be given meaning through present contexts -- are to be cautioned against. The politics of the

face is not recognized in the politics of evolutionary psychology and needs to be critiqued and made explicit.

Facing Dominance

"I havn't see any models w/ large noses lately." -- (White student)

The politics of the face are evident when one analyzes the representations and meanings of media depictions of women and men. The reproduction of racist Patriarchal ideology through visual portrayals, the social meanings of faces, are now communicated through the mass production of facial representations. One of the major meaning-makers of the face which has been studied is the social representation of faces in advertising. Goffman (1976) introduced the face as a culturally meaningful symbol in his analyses of gendered advertisements. Goffman illustrated the different presentations of women and men in ads, and the gendered meaning of these presentations. Occupational and family roles, dominance and subordination, women as child-like and smiling, men as serious and stoic; these were among some of the patterns Goffman noted. In addition, cues of submission such as head and eye aversion between women and men were noted. Barthel (1988) recently expanded on such analyses, and also found consistent gendered representations of women and men. Gender roles for White women and men have been well-documented and analyzed within ads, and the meanings of dominance and power have been central to these critiques.

Archer, Iritani, Kimes & Barrios (1983) empirically investigated facial prominence and posture in public photos, as well as responses to these representations. Archer et al. introduced the term "face-ism" as the tendency for men's faces to be portrayed more often, and with more facial prominence, than women. They found that in America and 11 other nations there were significant face-ism effects in photos of women and men in magazines. In addition, they found an increase in face-ism in artwork over 6 centuries; with face-ism present from the 16th century and increasing over time. Responses to facial prominence indicate that the more face is shown, the higher the target is perceived on attributes such

as intelligence, physical appearance, and ambition. Since men are portrayed more often with high facial prominence, it is mostly men who are being perceived as intelligent and ambitious. Such representations will have serious consequences on the mass scale of advertising that exists today.

Issues of power and dominance are strongly related to facial prominence. Targets high in facial prominence are perceived as more powerful and dominant (Zuckerman & Kieffer, 1994). Zuckerman and Kieffer (1994) also found that more face-ism exists in portrayals of Whites than Blacks, and that such portrayals are also context dependent. These representations then re-create White male dominance, and the perception of the White male as powerful. Lest this be mistaken for some type of common-sense, practically-based portrayal, there is evidence which indicates that the maker of images will effect the type of images presented. For example, Zuckerman and Kieffer found less face-ism in feminist publications and art by Black artists; in other words, who produces the images will effect the type of images they are; and the images seen in popular culture are definitely representing a certain type of person and invoking specific perceptions of them.

The sexism and racism in facial prominence portrayals may therefore be reproducing stereotypical perceptions and attitudes. In addition, the interpretations of "baby-facedness," occurring within a culture which sends such different and specific messages regarding women's and men's faces, must then also be subject to critique based on sexism and racism. The U.S. perceptions and presentations of women and men have been found to be related to gender roles and race, and issues of power and dominance; therefore, conclusions drawn from social responses to baby-faces must be viewed in that larger context. This consumer context is one which mass produces, and depends on the mass consumption, of highly orchestrated images.

Producing and Consuming: Bodies as Process

"We even have Miss America pageants to show everyone this is the model of beauty." -- (White student)

"Most people on magazines are caucasian with light eyes very long legs and big eyes. I rarely see very ethnic looking people on magazine covers & t.v. I don't see too many hispanic actors on t.v. The cultural definition of beauty has to a very light skinne, light eyed person because that are the type of people who are portrayed as beautiful through the media." -- (Latina student)

The larger context of U.S. sexist and racist images must be acknowledged in any discussion of experiences of the body. The representations of White women in the U.S. mirror the information on White women, gender roles, and issues of weight and beauty; however, representations and experiences of Women of Color are only now being investigated. Portrayals of gender, experiences of White women and the body, as well as the relationships between them, have been well-documented. The White standard which dominates U.S. popular media, although uniform in presentation, is not necessarily uniformly received. Differences among Women of Color's responses to imagery has changed the focus of body image and attractiveness research.

Women of color may not "fit" into the White standard, nor desire to; however, the absence of expected reactions (expected based on previous research from White participants) should not lead one to assume that the absence of specific weight-related responses means an absence of feelings regarding the body and attractiveness. If one measures Women of Color's experiences with beauty on the same terms as, and through the measures designed for, and by, White women, it is easy to come to false conclusions. As previously indicated, gender roles and femininity, as well as standards for the body, have been found to vary between Black and White women and men. The presence of these differences, however, cannot be simply accepted and then continuously assumed; rather, they must be examined and understood. The social identities and experiences of ethnicities hold very different meanings for White women and Women of color; and ethnicity/race is a vital social experience one must take into account when studying

psychological responses; and most importantly, how ethnicity/race becomes meaningful as a social and personal category.

The social categories which are based on visual indicators such as skin color and type, facial features, and hair textures, are broad generalizations which emphasize the sameness of those who are considered different. From outside of a crowd one looks in, and views a group as a whole, an entity, sharing similar qualities, creating a perception of unity. The treatment of those in the group often is guided by this myopia; however, the many individuals who form the group view it from within. The scenery is different, bumpy, diverse. One is identified from the outside in and the inside out. The boundaries necessary for these inside/outside distinctions are themselves a point of contention. It is here that ascribed identities become meaningful to all who share the boundary. In itself the experience of self and other is a multiple process. One is not only "in" the group looking "out"; but also looking "in." Social identities are multiply created and experienced, and so the acts of comparing and identifying become relevant to any discussion of personal identification and experience. It is here that social identity theories will be discussed in order to situate, complicate, and complement, theories on ethnicity and the female body.

Ethnicities and Identities

The We's and They's of Ethnicity

"I guess it is because they resemble what someone of my ethnicity would look like, (not all, but the closest in comparison to the other pictures.) I found focusing on that picture more often and feeling rather inadequate. I guess the other pictures didn't effect me because I am really no interested in what people who are focusing on other pictures (I assume blacks & whites) are thinking of me in regards to beauty. To be honest, I find myself more absolved in what people of my own culture see me as. I've been in situations where I've been with pretty girls of other nationalities and still feel pretty myself, but if I

am among girls of my own nationality I begin to compare myself and feel bad." -- (Latina student)

Ethnicity is often presented as a relevant social category in regard to its marginality in/marginalization to dominant culture. Theories on social identity are relevant to understanding meanings of ethnic identity. Social identity theory (Tajfel, Billig & Bundy, 1971) is based on the notion that group formation is a direct result of social categorization. The three psychological processes which comprise group formations are 1) social categorization, 2) social comparison, and 3) psychological work (Tajfel, 1981). The proposition that social categorization itself activates self-categorizations -- in which one groups oneself into a common category which contrasts with other categories -- is followed by the notion of self-stereotyping, in which one then views the self as a prototypic group member.

Empirical evidence from studies on social comparison processes have found much evidence to support the basic ideas of social identity theory. Individuals in Western culture do tend to compare themselves with similar others, and these comparisons do seem to serve some type of enhancement, protective, or self-serving motivation or purpose (Crosby & Zubin, 1990; Major, 1989; Major, 1993; Major, Sciacchitano & Crocker, 1993); and often the process of social-comparison with in-group members is matched by a simultaneous devaluation of out-group members (Major et al., 1993; Klein & Kunda, 1993; Taylor & Lobel, 1989).

Social identity and comparison is perceived as based on the need to be validated as a group member, as well as to be distinct and separate from others, to be individuated and unique (Brewer, 1991; Oyserman, 1993; Triandis, Botempo, Villareal, Asal & Lucca, 1988; Rabbie & Horwitz, 1988). The process which is guided by self-enhancement and separation, however, is itself dependent on context (Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak & Vredenburg, 1995; Crosby, 1984; Suls & Wan, 1987); as are the "similar" others which

one identifies and compares with are chosen for their relevance as a comparison group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

The social categorization of race/ethnicity as meaningful demarcations of difference is one that is both imposed and actively recreated by group members. Although initial theories on social comparisons rested on the assumptions that "arbitrary" group membership was enough to trigger in-group formation, and that the only possible motivations for comparisons were drives towards accurate self-evaluations and self-enhancement (Festinger, 1954; Festinger, 1957), the relationships between social location and motivations have been expanded to include the social situations which make certain comparisons more likely to occur than others.

Wood (1989) suggests that an active social environment will impose certain comparisons on an individual; that it is not only the individual choosing who to compare against and on what dimension, but that one's available comparison targets are limited, or imposed, by the environment (233). Situational limitations and possibilities which affect comparison processes offer a more complex and dynamic theory in which the individual and culture are in constant negotiation and interaction; for as an individual is influenced in her/his self-concept through the environment, one's self-concept will then influence and make sense of the choices and types of dimensions with which one compares and identifies. One of the major impositions of social comparisons is based on the categorization of race/ethnicity, and these groups are defined as different through physical characteristics (Zuckerman, 1990).

Social comparisons between in-groups and out-groups are major ways in which ethnicity and race are maintained. Racial prejudice is consistent with pro-racial-in-groups essentializing and demarcating difference against the racial-out-group. Racially prejudiced people, people who identify highly with their racial in-group, have been found to maximize the distinctiveness of their ingroup relative to negatively evaluated outgroups, and actively determine who is "in" and who is "out" when confronted with ambiguous targets

(Blascovich, Wyer, Swart & Kibler, 1997). Ethnic categorizations are prevalent maintainers of we/they distinctions.

Ringer and Lawless (1989) discuss the "They-ness" of race-ethnicity in U.S. culture as how one is perceived by other ethnic groups, as well as the beliefs, stereotypes and policies which are then directed towards "Them." "We-ness," as ethnic solidarity among the Othered ethnic groups, has emerged in relation to Othered status. Ringer and Lawless state that all demarcations of us/them relations among ethnic groups must be viewed in terms of political and economic factors which have created and maintain them. Racism has been built in to the very foundations of U.S. society, and has constructed the perception of race and ethnicity as closed systems, autonomous, contained entities. Membership in an ethnic or racial group is not a voluntary choice; rather, one is categorized within a pre-existing system of racial demarcations. In addition, the traits and ideals associated with ethnic groups are social creations, maintained and perceived through the simple fact of parentage and responses to the physical cues which have been designated as relevant indicators of one's parentage (50-51).

Ringer and Lawless continue by discussing the group/internal maintenance "we-ness" among ethnic groups in the face of the forces and Others who have created their "They-ness." Tajfel and Turner's (1979) theories of social mobility and change, in this context, highlight the place of contradiction and conflict that many members of devalued ethnic groups live within. To live in a culture in which one has been Othered, and then to be expected to be "mobile" or "change," will reproduce Othering rather than foster comfortable inclusion. Assimilation and acculturation into dominant U.S. culture, a culture with its history and present embedded in essentialism and racism, may make more holes than fill them. Notions of individuation and separation, the abandonment of one group for another, stand in stark contrast to the experiences of many Women of Color in the U.S. The diversity within ethnicities is lost in the cultural politics of constructing ethnic hierarchies (Hall, 1992). As long as one is "raced," or explicitly identified through

ethnicity, one is Other. U.S. culture has very specific delineators of "race," most of them based on physical characteristics of those perceived as "They."

Essentially Speaking

"...if you're not a specific race or cultural you are also classified as not fitting in." --(Black student)

"...not every woman of every race is Tall, Slender and beautiful." -- (Black student)

"Race is a definite separator. There is black beauty and white beauty and beauty according to other races standards also." -- (Black student)

Race and ethnicity have usually been defined in terms of observable physical features, such as skin color, hair type and color, eye color, stature, head shape and size, and facial features, especially the nose (Zuckerman, 1990, 1297-1298). Variations within race, however, are often overlooked and essentialized; or, confined and given meaning by social, legal, and cultural definitions (Zuckerman, 1990, 1298). Assigning specific traits to ethnic groups has been one means of extending racist meaning; and stereotyping is prevalent in demarcating group and ethnic differences, for in order for race to be maintained as a relevant social category, inheritable and unchangeable attributes must be assigned.

Stereotypes, as "common-sense" ways of knowing, are often perpetuated by their very existence. In other words, the existence of stereotypes leads people to believe in, or enact, these stereotypes; thereby reproducing them (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Offerman & Beil, 1992; Pazy, 1992; Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). Stereotyping has been conceptualized as a means of simplifying cognitive categories (Jones, 1990); as well as reactive behavior to observed social realities (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Stereotyping can also stem from social-institutional barriers which effect expectations (Bylsma & Major, 1992; Offerman & Beil, 1992; Pazy, 1992) and are often maintained by placing responsibility on the targets of stereotypes for negative situations

(Jones, 1990, 97). Known reality, social expectations, and personal expectations then feed off of each other in order to maintain the world as it is understood.

Stereotypes allow for the targeted person or group to be perceived as "naturally" or "inherently" inferior; dispositional attributions are made rather than social ones, and therefore people are often viewed as deserving of their situation. Gender stereotyping has been found to increase with age (Cann & Garrett, 1984; Cann & Palmer, 1986; Gettys & Cann, 1981; Kreidberg, Butcher & White, 1978; Sheplack, Odgen & Tobin-Bennett, 1984). Children have also been found to sex-type imaginary occupations (Sheplack et al. 1984), providing evidence for the early internalization of social realities and learned stereotypes. As with social comparison, stereotyping processes are affected by what categories are considered to be relevant.

Stereotypes become meaningful in culture, obtain meaning and power in culture, and serve to categorize and justify social situations (Deaux & Ullman, 1983; Glickman, 1984; Lamphere, 1987; Ong, 1987; Reskin & Hartmann, 1986; Thompson, 1989). Stereotypes develop in order to explain, legitimate, and perpetuate status/power differences between social groups; and by doing so create false impressions of innate characteristics of individuals and groups, focusing on individual factors and so maintaining the status quo (Jost, 1995, 407-408). The prevailing social order will define both one's relationships with, and beliefs about, others; and the unconnected nature of stereotyped distinctions can trigger destructive competition and discrimination (Opatow, 1990, 5-7).

Some research indicates that when information on individuals or contexts are given, as well as proximity with stereotyped individuals or groups, the stereotyping response will decrease (Anderson, 1993; Deaux & Ullman, 1983, 199-200; Epstein, 1993, 193; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990, 204). Other studies indicate that group contact will instead cause greater group identification in order to maintain a sense of distinctiveness

(Kosmitzki, 1996). The response may vary depending on what groups are interacting, how, where, and the meanings of those interactions. For example, stereotyping is one of the main activities of exclusion, and stereotypes are comprised often of trait characterizations. Kunda, Sinclair and Griffin (1997) discuss the use of traits as one of the key distinguishers of self vs. Others.

Traits in and of themselves, however, are not necessarily similar in meaning dependent on what larger stereotype they are embedded in; rather, Kunda et al. state, there are variations of the meanings of traits dependent on which stereotyped group they are applied to. Traits are contextualized in larger stereotypes and social comparisons, and therefore the dispelling of stereotypes may also be highly context and content dependent. As was discussed in terms of what-is-beautiful-is-culturally-good, gender and ethnicity are situated distinctively and interactively; and the location of ethnic groups in the U.S. will effect perceptions of groups as well as responses and experiences within groups.

Re-Membering Groups

"I think in the U.S. the beauty is based on the few models from the magazines. Although often said that U.S. is individualistic, and individualism is important, and so on, in my opinion everyone strives to achieve that magazine type beauty, weight." --
(White student)

"I feel that because of my Puerto Rican ethnic and socio-economic background such things as beauty do not really effect me because I have more important things to worry about (such as economics). But for a Caucasian women she feel this a part of her lifestyle." -- (Latina student)

Markus and Kitayama (1991) propose that the view of the independent self, and the psychological processes related to individuation stereotypes based on individualistic conceptions, are Western processes which are dependent on the cultural value of being individuated. They propose that in a culture where there is an interdependent view of self, and interconnection with others is valued, individuals will be motivated differently towards

these values. Studies in Japan, for example, have found no self-enhancing biases to be present in social comparisons; rather, "other-enhancement" motives have been documented (242-243). What will determine relevance for social comparison, and when and how comparisons are made, is then a question of study which can best be understood through a situational/contextual approach to social relations.

Theories on personal and group identity are highly subject to criticism based on their individualistic notions of distinctiveness, and the assumptions that separating the self from others is psychologically healthy. What is healthy in one culture may be considered deviant in another; one must take into consideration the social and personal consequences accrued based on the valued behavior in any given culture. The Western theories -- based in a culture which is economically designed for, and ideologically prefers, individualistic behaviors -- are also marked by a tendency to view individualism and collectivism as separate, polar constructions which exist in opposition. This notion is being critiqued and the merging of these constructions is quite relevant for understanding issues regarding ethnic identifications and the experience of the self.

Lykes (1985) critiques the traditional Western Psychological models and assumptions which emphasize autonomy, separation, and independence while ignoring the "inherently social character of the self." (363). Lykes proposed that majority groups are more likely to see the self as individualistic, and minority/less powerful groups are more likely to see the self-in-relation. She studied this among White women (n=54) and men (n=30) and found that women were more likely than men to perceive the interrelation of the self and others (especially women of lower socioeconomic status). Lykes proposes that there is a relationship between gender and social individuality, and that the notions of the social and the individual must be reconceptualized as unified, not separate. Lykes also points to the example of many Black communities which have extended kinships and states that, "community or collective experiences are fundamental to the articulations of individuality and relationship." (362-363). The unification of individuality and collectivity

is vital since not only are they no longer opposed, no longer are they separate, but they are in relation to one another and part of each other (Wink, 1997, 330-331).

Ackelsberg (1996) also states that notions of individualism are mirrored by a totalizing understanding of community (88). Many theories view people and communities in a dynamic relationship, however, communities are often presented as systems of norms and/or imperatives which define the individual, and marginalize those who do not conform. This perception of community as the greater force, and one which "defines," is dangerous since it reinforces hegemonic perceptions of assimilation and acculturation. Ackelsberg states that it is important for a place to exist where marginalized voices can speak without immediately trying to assimilate those voices into a larger framework; that there can be inclusivity without assimilation (92-3). Ackelsberg also views identity as changing and developing, not permanent and fixed; and sees group identity developed through social and political experiences, and therefore it must be addressed on those grounds (98).

Gaines et al (1997) conducted two studies which investigated individualism, collectivism, and familism as distinct cultural values by race/ethnicity, and found them to be separate dimensions, with collectivism and familism being positively correlated. Individualism (orientation towards one's own welfare), collectivism (orientation towards the welfare of one's community) and familism (orientation towards the welfare of one's immediate and extended family) are often presented as separate opposing values. Gaines et al. also critique these assumptions, and states that comparing ethnic groups within the U.S. is an important method for understanding the more nuanced manifestations of such values. In their investigation, Gaines et al. found that "persons of Color" were higher than Anglos on collectivism and familism, but not individualism. They also point to "familism," in regard to extended kinships among African American "fictive kin" and Latina/o communities "compadrazgo." (1461). The lines which dominant Anglo-American

discourse draws between family and community are much different than those in the communal/familial relationships mentioned in other communities.

Identification

"Media states the women should be thin or even waif like. However, different cultures view beauty differently. Ex: Caucasians have the same view of beauty as the media. Blacks view beauty on a different scale. It's not how thin you are but how physically fit you are. Attitude also have a lot to do with it." -- (Black student)

"I think you should include a category for those of us with mixed heritage. Believe me, it affects your views alot." -- (Latina/Black student)

The notion that simply belonging to a group is enough to trigger in/out group behaviors has thus been challenged and explored further since proposed by Tajfel, and what makes a group a group has been made more complex. Flippen, Hornstein, Siegal and Weitzman (1996) studied the theory that ingroup bias will not occur without a sense of interdependence, and challenged the notion that similarity in itself engenders ingroup formation and bias. Categorization itself will depend on the situation one is in, and what category is relevant to that situation. In four experiments, participants were informed of a threat from various sources to members of a social category to which they belonged. They also were given the opportunity to help a person presented as members of different groups. The results of the first two experiments indicated that in-group bias only occurred when there was a threat from a social source rather than a non-social source (or no threat). The third experiment indicated that bias only favored those similar on the threatened dimension, rather than those similar on another non-threatened dimension. Finally, results of the fourth experiment revealed that when participants knew the source of the threat, bias was only directed against members of the threatening group.

Spears, Doosje, and Ellemers (1997) also investigated the comparative contexts which effect self-perceptions and self-stereotyping. Self-stereotyping, as proposed by Tajfel (1987), is the perception of the self as a prototypical group member. In four studies

the effects of self- or public-perceived threats to group status and distinctiveness on self-stereotyping on low or high ingroup identity was explored. All studies supported their proposal that initial group identity (high or low) will determine whether individuals "stick with," or separate from, the group when identity as a group member is threatened. Spears et al. explain that the context of self-stereotyping will vary depending on the social-comparative context, while perceived prototypicality is more general and independent of the comparative context. It is proposed that self-perceptions are more fluid and complex than previously conceived, and "the effects of identity threat and identification are likely to be mutually reinforcing and bidirectional in the sense that not only may a common threat enhance identification, but high identifiers may also be susceptible to a group identity threat." (Spears et al., 1997, 539).

This is a very important contribution to the literature, since it brings into discussion evidence which makes more complex an individuals' experiences and identities within groups; and that identity itself will affect group behaviors. Previous conceptions of social identities posited the process as a reactive response, rather than an active one; in other words, social identity is an active process in which each group member participates. Identification, the extent to which an individual identifies and commits the self to a category, will then moderate the process of self-stereotyping; self-stereotyping is therefore a part of a process, not a product of one (Spears et al., 1997, 541).

The main finding, that self-stereotyping is consistently higher for high identifiers than low identifiers, de-groups the group into a more complex system than is usually presented. The application of many of the theories regarding group membership, identity, and context is important to truly understand the possibilities for these conceptions. The acknowledgement of what identities signify to group members has been explored in relation to ethnic identity. Being a member of an ethnic group may indeed mean that one has been categorized as such, however, that does not mean that all members experience ethnic identity in the same way, or to the same extent and degree. Ethier and Deaux

(1994) conducted a longitudinal study of Hispanic students during their first year at predominantly Anglo Universities. They found that participants with initially strong ethnic identities tended to become involved in cultural activities, which thereby continued to strengthen their identification. Participants with lower initial ethnic identities tended to perceive more threat in the environment, showed decreases in self-esteem associated with group membership, and lowering identification with the group.

This study is akin to Spears et al's (1997) study, and provides more information on self-identification within groups, and how meaning and extent of identification can affect one's experiences. Ethnic identification is influenced by a variety of factors, such as language spoken in the home, ethnic composition of neighborhoods, the percentage of friends in the same ethnic group (Ethier & Deaux, 1990; Phinney, 1990, 505-506); and it is important here to recognize that one's ethnic and group identity is supported by social context rather than inherent in the fact that one is categorized as a group member. The links between personal and social, the interrelationships between multiple identities, are vital in understanding what group membership means within a group as well as without it (Deaux, 1993).

Hurtado (1997) also discusses the importance of context for understanding group memberships and identities. Context is often ignored as dominant culture is often assumed as being the only context, a natural environment (316). Previous trait approaches to cultural and group differences have ignored contextual and historical factors in determining and shaping group differences (303). History, social location, and the constant shaping and re-shaping of groups and environments are often overlooked. Hurtado discusses the unique position of people of Mexican origin as a "domestic minority that had been conquered on its own land...a conquered native population, who subsequently became an immigration population, and who

then tried to assimilate." (304). The problems that are encountered in cultural adaptations are not the result of "culture conflict," generated by different traits of essentialized groups; rather, Hurtado states, it is important to understand such experiences through the Internal Colonial Model which views cultural adaptations as the result of interactions with the U.S. economic structure and Capitalist system.

"Culture conflict" is often assumed something inherent in the Other, in this case people of Mexican origin, which clashed and needed to be remedied. Theories on acculturation and assimilation assumed that contact between cultures would influence one another; but instead, there is a unidirectional pattern of the dominant culture subsuming the oppressed (304-306). Hurtado also critiques the notion of "free choice" inherent in concepts of acculturation and assimilation, and states that discrimination and prejudice must be viewed as integral parts of negotiating cultural adaptation; and that power differentials will undoubtedly effect cultural adaptations and experience (306-307). Hurtado challenges the earlier propositions by social identity theorists which assumed a universal motive of a positive sense of distinctiveness, since the experiences of ethnic immigrants have often been marked by strong pressures and survival needs to adapt. Studying ethnicity, therefore, requires consideration of a groups' relationship to the larger, dominant culture (Phinney, 1990, 508), which will effect identity formation, maintenance, and content (Phinney, 1990, 505-506).

It is very important to understand the dialectic between groups on the basis of power differentials; and ethnicity and racial groups are defined on the premise of hierarchy. It is also important to understand the individual and the group, as well as the fact that one is not only the categorized, but the categorizer. Group memberships are indeed important and effect how one feels about the self and others, one's behaviors, and one's self-concept. Simon, Hastedt and Auferheide (1997) present group size as a major variable which can influence the self-categorization process; and state that minority members are far more likely to interpret themselves as relatively interchangeable group

members (collective identity) than unique members (individualistic identity). In two laboratory experiments, Simon et al. manipulated relative in-group size (majority/minority) and meaningfulness (high/low); with depersonalization of self-perception as the Dependent Variable.

Results from the first experiment indicated that minority members were more likely to show depersonalization of self-perceptions than majority members *if and only if* the meaningfulness of the in/out group category was high. In addition, the second experiment found that meaningful social categorization affected only the minority members' self-perceptions. This is a very important contribution since it provides information that self-perceptions and categorizations are more than just a function of group size, but group size as interacting with *meaning*. Meaning has often been overlooked in grand theorizing, and so has been missed in many studies which did not investigate the substance of categorizations, especially by ethnicity.

Situating Individuals and Groups

"I realise I feel good about myself when I don't compare my figure with mannequins like those." -- (Latina student)

The meaning of individual and collective identity has also been found to effect the choice of who one compares the self with/against. Smith and Spears (1996) investigated individual versus group identity salience on the evaluations of task ability and attributions of rewards based on performance. Participants were assigned to one of two groups in which identity salience was manipulated (group-primed or individual primed), and within these groups they manipulated personal or collective advantage/disadvantage. The Dependent Variables consisted of comparison choices and preferred evaluations of tasks.

The results of their study revealed main effects on personal dis/advantage by the three manipulations; and this was qualified by a significant interaction between personal and collective situation. For the collectively disadvantaged participants, the personally disadvantaged reported slightly less ability than the personally advantaged; however, for

collectively advantaged participants, the personally disadvantaged reported significantly less ability than the personally advantaged. In addition, across all conditions, the choice for comparisons were marked by a preference to learn one's own score and the average other in-group score; however, group-primed participants were significantly more likely to choose to know the average out-group score.

The results of this work support their hypotheses that 1) when individual identity is salient, evaluations reflect personal attributes and the participants personalize dis/advantage, and 2) when group identity is salient, participants are "released" from, or engage in a strategic move away from, justifying outcomes on personal terms. Therefore, Smith and Spears propose, group identity can protect against "biased individual rationalization of personal outcomes, especially under conditions of collective disadvantage." (690). If the group is salient, personal performance holds different meanings since it highlights the injustice of collective disadvantage rather than a perception of personal failure (692). Awareness of prejudice as external to oneself has also been found to have highly protective features for one's self-esteem (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa & Major, 1991); although this may depend on what group one identifies with, and the meaning of that identification (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine & Broadnax; 1994). In addition, it is important to recognize that group identity is often most salient when one is a member of a less powerful, or Othered, group.

Other researchers have chosen to equate stigmatized group members on the basis of their oppressed status. On this theoretical note, Frable, Blackstone and Scherbaum (1990) studied what Goffman termed "Master Status," an unusual or statistically infrequent variation which becomes central to understanding an individual's character; and this can be culturally stigmatized or valued, as long as the person is outside of the norm. Frable et al. wanted to study the significance of "just being different," with the notion that marginality in and of itself is enough to force a common type of adaptation to environments. They proposed that being marginal "unites all diverse groups of master

status people." (140), and that being "deviant" or "normal" would effect one's ability engage in *mindfulness* (paying close attention to/active processing of all different environmental elements) or *mindlessness* (passive processing of information).

Critiquing the artificiality of many studies on group membership, Frable et al. decided to study "naturally occurring" master status conditions (141). They selected and created 44 self-defined women "deviants" to form four groups. The four groups were: 1) visible positives (6 attractive women); 2) visible negatives (5 "overweight", 4 Black, 2 "facially scarred" women; 3) invisible positive (8 wealthy, 4 athletic, 3 "talented"); and 4) invisible negative (3 bisexual, 2 raped, 3 incest survivors). These 44 women were paired with 44 "normals," women who did not define themselves as belonging to any of these groups. Frable et al. state that they found that marginality (especially invisible marginality) engendered mindfulness in social situations, as marginal individuals tended to view from the other persons perspective as well as recalled detailed information of the environment.

Although an interesting idea, this work is fraught with problems, assumptions, and is a perfect example to study the idea of social location and meaning in terms of personal identification and group membership. To begin, it can be assumed that all of the "normals" in the study were White women, since being Black was considered to be a negative master status condition. Therefore, out of 88 women, only 4 were Black, and every other category was "simplified" by keeping all other participants who were White. Frable et al. do not specifically state the Whiteness of the "normals," but it must logically be inferred. It is possible that the researchers were trying to acknowledge, or emphasize, the social dominance and normalization of Whiteness; however, without explicit statements of such intention, the research recreates racist assumptions. By leaving race unstated, and yet implicitly identifying race through the "normals," the research does not necessarily study "master status" as it claims; for that status itself is dependent on who is defined as "normal." What does it mean for the research that "normals" consisted of a very specific type of person? What does it mean

that some individuals identified with some categories and others did not? Can one be sure that "invisible" marginals identify mainly in terms of that particular "master" status? The term "normals" is not only problematic, as well the operationalization of "normals," but it can serve as a reminder of the errors of previous work for it can be imagined that if the study included men, would the women then be included in the "normals" group? Would only White men be normal? How would this affect the research, the meanings, the conclusions? In other words, normal is variable not just a variable. It is important to recognize who is being compared to whom, on what dimensions, and how these meanings will affect conclusions. Unfortunately, to find a common theme among "all marginals" will marginalize some more than others.

Fiske (1993) investigated a similar theory, and confirmed that those with less status know more, are more aware of and knowledgeable, about those in higher status positions Ryan (1996) tested the accuracy of stereotypes among Black and White students. Ryan found that that there was a greater overgeneralization in the stereotypes of Blacks than of Whites. Black students were much more accurate in their descriptions of both Black and White, and indicated more familiarity with the White outgroup; while White students showed large in/out group differences in perceptions, and were much more accurate in judging their own group than in judging Black students. Here the influence of power and context, meaning of group affiliation, and the consequences of such markers of difference become evident.

Contextualizing Culture

"In the U.S. - most people believe that to be anglo, tall, and thin is beautiful. I say this because of the way the media defines beauty and/or represents it. For instance shows like Baywatch are constantly criticized by "Minority" groups for not having any "minorities" in them. The cast of "Baywatch" is composed of white so-called beautiful women - Hence, excluding "minorities" from what is beautiful." -- (Latina student)

"a blond, blue-eyed All American girl. In the United States appearance is everything. Models are considered beautiful. The idea of light hair and light eyes is dominant in the United States. I have noticed many "minority" women have tried to copy the American standard of beauty. Many have dyed their hair, or used colored contacts. I believe that unconsciously they are trying to fit into that American view of beauty." --
 (Latina student)

Davalos (1996) discusses the importance of focusing on contexts of domination when talking about the lives of Latinas. Culture varies within communities, and for Latinas the experience of multiple identities is often the experience of being caught between cultures (119). Hurtado (1996) also discusses the simultaneity of oppression as complex in the lives of Latinas. She states that White women have typically experienced an individualized and internal form of social control, partly because of their immersion in the lives and relations with White men. Other oppressed groups, however, are often physically separated and fight against that which would "depoliticize their concerns." (19). For example, Hurtado further explains that this social positioning creates a strength among Latinas that are the outcomes of structural relationships, not essentialist racial characteristics (26). The continued isolation of communities of Color, she continues, help to maintain more well-defined constituencies; and these isolated communities themselves are dependent on processes of exclusion (152).

The power to exclude is the power to create boundaries, and Hurtado points out the ability of dominant groups to de-emphasize it's function as a group is the power to create falsely "natural" norms (156). This de-grouping action not only continues exclusion by ignoring Whiteness as a group with power, but continues to leave the bulk of "race work" on communities of color. Essentializing the Other, then asking to be educated on that Other, is to obscure analyses of the processes of domination and submission, and to continue to essentialize ethnic group members (Hurtado, 1996, 135-141, 152-160). Essentializing others means simplification (i.e. stereotyping as cognitive simplifiers of

massive amounts of information); however, the creation of essential Others will then entail at least: 1) The struggle of the Othered to be recognized; 2) The Othered having to educate the dominant culture on "who they are." The amount of struggle and energy, time and resources, which Others have to expend are the direct result of being put into an Other category; and since it is "their problem," the dominant culture can sit back and learn without expending their energy on Others' concerns.

To be in this position of Othered will entail much psychological work, as well as create a variety of strategies to deal with this status. Acknowledging that there are variations in ethnic groups and identities (Zavella, 1993, 59) is indeed to complicate future research, and by so doing seeking explanations and understandings which are by far more succinct, particularized, and focused than what is presently passed off as multicultural work. Present multicultural work tends to essentialize, to include groups, but not to recognize and discuss variations within groups. Looking deeper into the many crevices and nuances of ethnic and group identities, while maintaining a larger structural understanding, will bring research and theory closer together, and closer to the reality under study, without having to resort to misguided universalistic explanations.

The concept of identities as fluid and shifting, rather than as impermeable categories, opens up many areas of exploration in order to locate meanings and influences on identity, such as history, social context, power relations, economic shifts, etc. (Lykes & Mallona, 1997). Identity and consciousness emerge through social contest and struggle, they are not natural precursors (Deutsch, 1994). Ideas of multiple consciousness and social location redirect research questions and interpretations by refusing to make assumptions which would obscure complex realities; and in so doing, hopefully avoid many of the mistakes that characterize previous research and theory. When dealing with ethnicity and ethnic identity, it is not good science to assume that skin color or country of origin is enough to signify ethnic identity. Zavella (1991) gives some examples of more

questions that must be asked in order to understand ethnic identity, rather than just checking off a pre-written box: Are the participants born in the U.S.? If so, what generation? If not, when did they immigrate? Where were they socialized as children? What language(s) were/are spoken? What is their skin tone/color/shade, and other physical features? (319). These are just a few examples which can help to clarify multiple layers of context, social location, and the various experiences which intersect; rather than falling into essentialist paradigms and theories (diLeonardo, 1991, 31).

Self-Categorizing and Social(izing) Group Identities

"Some of the questions dealing with race and women were vague. Especially in the Latino community, where society is divided between Latinos and Hispanics.- ... It was interesting because one doesn't realize the stereotypes that they have in their mind about their own community (ethnic).-" -- (Latina student)

Dominant cultural discourse will frame and give meaning to a variety of social categorizations and distinctions. Traits and stereotypes applied to ethnic groups will indeed influence the development and experience of ethnicity. Ethnic identity, and content of that identity, will be strongly influenced in terms of the larger macro-cultural environment. Gurin, Hurtado and Peng (1994) have found that there is a difference in the content of identities between Chicanas (U.S. born) and Mexicanas (Mexican born). These differences are related to factors such as length of residence, language facility, geographic location/dispersal, and working in ethnically diverse settings. The relationship between group contact and social identities is an important connection for it makes clearer the dynamics between macro-social conditions and how micro-cultural conditions are situated within, in relation to, them. Frequency of intergroup contacts influence the content of social identities (523), and will effect social categorization which will then influence social comparisons (524). Gurin et al. found that the social identities of Chicanas were more differentiated than Mexicanas, with Chicanas

showing the characteristic "American lack of class consciousness," while Mexicanas held distinct social class identities (Gurin et al., 1994, 529; Hurtado, Gurin & Peng, 1994).

Such information forces one to rethink the models of ethnicity which are rooted in the assumptions of stability and assimilation. Nagel (1994) states that one must pay attention to the flux, the shifts, and the emergence of historically new ethnic groups which are produced through social interaction within and outside of ethnic communities (152). Ethnicity is thereby reformulated as something which is constructed -- through language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry, regionality, economics, etc. -- and the meaning of ethnic boundaries are constantly being revised, negotiated, revitalized by ethnic group members as well as "outsiders." (153). Nagel views ethnic identity as situational and changeable not only historically and between groups, but within groups as well; and points to the example of dark-skinned Caribbean immigrants who sometimes relate themselves to African Americans while other times distinguishing themselves from African Americans (155). This process of "layering," is situation and audience dependent, and will shift as the environment changes. Today's immigrants, she states, are tomorrow's ethnic groups (157), and as ethnic labels and meanings change, as economic and geographic locations shift, etc., so will the meanings and experiences of ethnic identities (Nagel, 1994, 166).

Ethnic identity has thus far been discussed in relation to social identity theories which recognize individual's relationships within groups as major aspects of the self concept. Ethnic identity formation is proposed as dynamic, changing over time and contexts, achieved through active negotiation between group members and larger social contexts. Ethnic identity is therefore conceptualized as a process rather than a fixed entity (Phinney, 1990, 502); and the existence of ethnic identity itself is considered to be defined by context, since such categorizations are not relevant except in terms of contrasting groups (Phinney, 1990, 509). In addition, early theories on social identity assumed an individualistic bias that is not present in all cultural interactions or personal identities.

Whose Bodies?! Whose Selves?

History in the Making

"Blacks = Being natural being in touch with your inner self being confident. Media, Whites = thin, no ass Blond Blue eyes big breast thin waiste line." -- (Black student)

"One of the sayings is that a white, tall, blonde, slim woman with blue eyes is beautiful in comparison to other female counterparts of the same ethnicity and culture." - (Black student)

An overlooked corollary to oppression based on race and ethnicity is the privilege and power of Whiteness in the U.S., and how that privilege has shaped cultural hegemonic perceptions, study, theories, and practices of ethnicity, as well as the experiences of many ethnic groups in the U.S. (Frankenberg, 1993).

Psychological inquiry itself must be subject to critiques of racism, and the absence of race information for participants and experimenters (Morawski, 1997). On the basis of "neutral, objective, value-free" conceptions of research and researcher, it has been the Other who is studied, not the experimenter or the experiments assumptions. Participants' race has slowly been recognized as an important factor in research, but experimenter race is still ignored on the empiricist notion that the social status of the observer is irrelevant to social study (Morawski, 1997, 14-15).

Whiteness has had to be forcefully reconceptualized as something active, not passive, invisible, or "normal." Fine (1997) discusses how schools and work do not only/merely "manage" race, but create and enforce racial meanings; Whiteness is considered as co-produced in a system in which all else is perceived as "lack" or "deficit." (58). Theories and research on "race" have typically focused on people of Color, and simultaneously obscured Whiteness as a relevant social category. The social scientific study of "race" has examined the operation of prejudice and stereotyping, focusing on Others, or the attitudes towards "nonWhites" by Whites. This focus then shifted from the

personal to examining systems of institutional prejudice, which continued to obscure Whiteness since it was still looking at the effects on those who have been explicitly "raced." (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997, 198). The effect of this gaze actually maintained racist assumptions rather than challenging them, since it operated within the same framework of seeing Others from the position of unquestioned power. Hurtado and Stewart (1997) propose that it is time to shift to the study of the privileged side of oppression (298); for previous theories have led to thinking of what it means NOT to be Other, rather than BEING something.

Phoenix (1997) explains that the way identity has been formulated requires a "consideration of difference," and that being White has created its meaning from the relation to what it means to be Black or Other (187). Phoenix conducted a study with young Londoners, and found the racial discourse among Whites to be characterized by the unawareness of Whiteness. She discusses this tendency on the basis of Whites not having an "active White identity," but a non-conscious one. This un-consciousness was also usually marked by the participants' refutation of essentialist thinking, and focus on "people are people" individualism; however, this only applied to Whites, for they essentialized what it meant to be Black (188).

Hurtado (1997) draws on social identity theory and the theory that oppressed groups (i.e. Latinas, Black women, ethnic "minorities") are more likely to "become" social identities; while privileged groups (i.e. Whites) may not even become social identities due to their privilege, their ability not to overtly self-categorize (309-310). Carter (1997) discusses the difference of being overtly classified, or socially categorized, into a racial/ethnic identity, and the invisible classification of Whiteness. Carter states that people of color know, are very aware, that they have been classified on the basis of color and race, and racial grouping is meaningful and significant to personal identity; while Whites are unaware of their membership in a racial group and its effects on their personal identity (198). Whiteness, according to Carter, must be viewed as a race since it is a

created social and political reality. To leave Whiteness unexamined is to further obscure the unexamined, sub/un-conscious forms of racial knowledge which embody individual, institutional and cultural racism (199, 206).

Whites Studying Whiteness

"I enjoyed the cultural questions but I think a question on how beauty is perceived within our culture should have been included." -- (Latina student)

"My reaction to these mannequins is that they are all "white" and how the Society feels that women should be." -- (Latina student)

Race and racism has been studied by Whites in power, and the focus of study has been on the Other. Racism itself has been reconceptualized and refined through study, and many forms of such dominance have been recognized. U.S. conceptualizations of race and racism has generally been simplistic, essentialized, and based on notions of overt forms of racist behavior. Racism has been reconceptualized as something not always individually, overtly acted; but also to include subtle, symptomatic and organized manifestations of which many White individuals are unaware; and White privilege includes ignoring race (Cleaver, 1997; Grillo & Wildman, 1997).

Sethi (1995) describes the U.S. understanding of racism as based on the "polarity of Black or White." (89). Sethi offers examples of the racists' perceptions of racism through Asian American experiences. "Real racism," she states, is not considered to be targeted at Asian Americans; but this is a misconstrual of racism which is expressed in a different way, such as the "positive" stereotype of the "model minority." This is damaging not only because such racism is internalized, but because those who do not fit into the Black-or-White category experience "internalized racial alienation." (Sethi, 1995, 90-91). Such sentiments have also been expressed in regard to Latina/o's feeling lost in the struggle of White VS. Black (Brady, 1995; Conciatore and Rodriguez, 1995). Unacknowledged racism not only perpetuates racist systems and assumptions, but **misdirects efforts of challenging racism.**

Gaertner (1973), contributed greatly to the understanding of the complexity, and often subtlety, of racism by introducing the behavior of "aversive racism." Aversive racists were found to be more likely to help Whites than Blacks, or, to treat Whites more positively than Blacks. Hindsight offers a look into the privileging of Whiteness; however, the path that this research took unfortunately does not foster a complex understanding of the structures of power in which racism operates. Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman and Rust (1993) use of the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) is a signal that it is time our understanding of power and context come to the fore, since their obscurity leads to dangerous conclusions. The CIIM is considered a means of reducing ingroup bias by transforming group members perceptions of boundaries from us/them to "we." This recategorization to a common ingroup identity, Gaertner et al. insist, is progressive in that it is not simply decategorization (5). This theory, based on and similar to the "contact hypothesis" to reduce stereotyping, is also based on the premise that being pro-ingroup does not necessarily mean than one disparages the outgroup.

Gaertner, Dovidio, Banker, Rust, Nier, Mottola and Ward (1997) revisit their hypothesis and, in the context of studying Whiteness, re-interpret their initial conclusions which viewed aversive racists as engaging in subtle racism; instead, they state that aversive racists are not necessarily anti-Black, but are "merely" pro-White (168). The privileging of Whiteness, it is explained, does not indicate subtle racism but pro-White biases. The discourse of discrimination is virtually lost here, and issues of power are invisible. To propose that the CIIM be used to re-group, re-categorize, in the context of obscured power differentials is similar to talking about "reverse racism." Prejudice without power means little, but "non-prejudice" with power means a lot. To create "common ingroups" in such a system will invariably lead back to assimilation techniques, regardless of how well-intentioned the aversive racist may be.

Yamato (1995) also discusses different forms of racism, and instead offers analyses based on structures of power. Yamato distinguishes four types of racism: 1) aware/blatant, 2) aware/covert, 3) unaware/unintentional, and 4) unaware/self-righteous. The last two forms are considered in some ways to be the most damaging because of their invisibility. The unaware/unintentional racist is described as someone who is nice, but does not have an awareness of privilege, and therefore does not challenge racism. The unaware/self-righteous racist is described as a "good White" who attempts to "shame people of color by knowing more about racism...and wants Blacks to be Blacker." (86). The self-righteous racist is a disturbing example of essentialist racist thinking which can stem from "non-political" multiculturalism; for the information gathered through simple "factual" dissemination of multicultural information without critique of structures of privilege, is then used against people of Color.

Carby (1992) discusses the problem that diversity and multiculturalism are now being used to essentialize different groups. To include works from diverse populations in academia, for example, is important; however, to treat each population as if it is completely unified is to continue the line of essentialist thinking. By ignoring social factors, relations, and powers which are at work in the social experience of ethnicity, simplistic interpretations and analyses are perpetuated. "Knowing the other" is not enough and will not challenge or change the existing frameworks of segregationist society (197). In addition, to try and "know" the Other without knowing the Self -- without Whites recognizing and educating themselves on privilege -- reinforces and maintains structures of oppressions by expecting the Other to educate the oppressor (Lorde, 1995, 445). As Yamato (1996) states in her "advice to Whites who want to be allies of people of color: ... work on racism for your sake, not 'theirs.'" (88). Whites can oppose racism and even privilege, however, they can still be treated with it; therefore,

it is important that Whites own Whiteness while simultaneously trying to reject what it presently means (Thompson and White Women Challenging Racism, 1997, 357-358).

History of Some Bodies

"The idea of beauty for people of color goes way back. We live in a society where nothing we have is considered beautiful..." -- (Black student)

Historical, contextual knowledge is vital for the understanding of present context. One cannot understand the "now" without understanding "then." (Mills, 1959). History must inform present inquiry, as our historical moment will effect the questions and theories that are posed and investigated (Gergen, 1973; Stewart & Healy, 1989). The study of within-culture communities and differences is necessary in order to more fully understand variations in ethnic experience and identity; and to dispel the assumption that a nation is comprised of identical members who experience the larger culture in the same way.

Women of Color in the U.S. have distinct histories which have shaped contemporary experiences. It is important to discuss communities as products of material conditions and constraints, historical bases of present experiences, and how such social factors influence the experiences of the self and the self as a member of a group (Hewitt, 1994). In the U.S., Black, Native American and Latin Women are presently at the lowest level of socioeconomic status, the most likely to live in poverty and be the sole supporters of the household, and spend the least amount of time in the educational system (Hurtado, 1996, 3-5). The histories of Women of Color in the U.S. are bound in different experiences with slavery, conquered homelands, and forced and semi-forced labor migrations (Hurtado, 1996, 11).

Latin Women

Latina/o's are currently the largest ethnic group in the United States (Hurtado, 1997, 307); and Latin women's feminisms and philosophies have not only been influenced by the history of their lands and peoples, but their present situations related to

immigration, language(s), etc. (Hurtado, 1996, 38). Many Latinas, for example, must be translators for monolingual parents, and so often begin at an early age dealing with agencies unresponsive to the poor working class, and this may help them to develop a public identity and awareness of politics at a very early age (Hurtado, 1996, 20). Knowing that there are connections between language and the emergence of self (Gal, 1991, 178), of the construction of reality (Edwards & Potter, 1993); and that more powerful discourses can co-opt certain forms of speech (Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Mishler, 1990), one can see that the history of Latina's in the U.S. is marked by a social attempt at enforced assimilation through the removal of language.

Since the invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898, the U.S. has repeatedly made efforts at "Americanizing" Latinas through educational systems and programs (Azize-Vargas, 1994, 261). The Americanization programs aimed at Mexican immigrants especially targeted women since the role of homemaker and child-rearer made them the perfect place to transmit the new rules of the new culture. Programs continued by targeting American born Chicanas, and the 1915 "Home Teacher Act" was a heavily pro-active action which made it's way into Latina homes and tried to educate families and teach English. This action was matched with major criticism of Latina homes and family structure, even meals were targeted since they were deemed "unhealthy." Latin women, also seen as a source of cheap domestic labor, were targeted for low paying work as well as targeted through means of controlling reproduction (Sanchez, 1994, 288-295). Latinas have been subject to racist ideas and implementations of reproductive ideologies, and were often "encouraged" (sometimes forcefully) to become sterilized, while White women were encouraged to procreate (Hurtado, 1996, 111). This is a stark manifestation of racist ideology acted upon women's bodies.

In addition to these active cultural abuses, many more subtle structures also exist in the form of negative and damaging stereotypes; and these stereotypes are often competing and conflicting among the larger U.S. dominant culture and Latina/o culture.

Flores-Ortiz (1995) states that many Latinas feel alienated from both their own culture and alien in the Anglo world, and this dual alienation is filled with contradictions and difficulties (253).

Even the assumptions regarding why Latinas immigrate to the U.S. are highly stereotyped, and these assumptions will effect the treatment and experience of/by Latinas. Arugelles and Rivero (1995) interviewed over 100 Latinas who were engaging in transnational migration with a U.S. destination. Arugelles and Rivero state that Latinas are usually assumed to be immigrants solely because of economic hardship; and although that is one reason, it is not the only one. Through their interviews they revealed other reasons for immigrating, including gender violence, enforced sex and gender roles, sexual orientation, sexual abuse and assault, and coerced motherhood (149). Essentializing Latinas, as well as the very reasons for their journeys and struggles to become U.S. citizens, obscures many complex experiences and lives to one simplistic notion based on a capitalistic focus.

Other stereotypes of Latinas are highly focused on the body. Latina women are stereotyped as good domestics, as sexually "mature," for their constant mispronunciation and malapropism of English, as well as stereotyped as being criminals and as whores (Cofer, 1995). These stereotypes are indicative of Latinas social status, as members of a targeted ethnic group which is perceived and treated as having no power and little value. The stereotyping of Latin women has crept into research which has tended to investigate Latinas in relationship to their roles in the family. This research has also re-contributed to it's sources by maintaining the essential image of Latinas as docile and passive (Garcia, 1990).

Many mixed stereotypes revolve around sexuality, as Latinas are simultaneously not supposed to feel sexual desire at all in Latina/o culture, and in U.S. White male discourse they are oversexualized and animalistic (Hurtado, 1996, 59, 99). Latinas are caught between two stereotypes as being both innocent virgins and sexy vixens (Rivera,

1997, 260); and such conflicting stereotypes not only effect the experience of sexuality, but also the presentation of self and appearance. Cofer (1995) discusses the mixed cultural expectations regarding appropriate dress/clothes, colors of clothing, jewelry, etc. These mixed messages make self-presentation choices even more complex than they already are.

In addition, the stereotyped expectations of Latinas silence, passivity, and as accepting of the patriarchy through docility and domesticity (Hurtado, 1996, 270) are not only damaging, but obscure many strengths and struggles and trivializes the experiences of Latinas through representations of weak and passive women (Hurtado, 1996, 71).

African American Women

African American women's history in the United States begins with their exploitation as enslaved persons, in both the realms of work and reproduction. This historical context in which African American women's experiences are rooted cannot be divorced from any discussion of African American women in the U.S. These women were "politically powerless units of labor" whose work did not benefit themselves but their owners (Collings, 1991). Their labor was abused in the field, and their bodies were abused, for Black women were also the mothers of the future labor force (Collins, 1991). Sexuality and fecundity of female slaves was a matter of public conversation, since the masters had strong interest in the creation of new slaves (Morton, 1991, 10). As explained by Ginsberg and Rapp (1991), "...state power has depended directly and indirectly on defining normative families and controlling populations." (314). Control over women's reproductive practices by slave owners directly benefited the owners, and must be understood in that context.

African American families in the United states have a distinct origin: the forced separation of families for the purpose of labor. The survival of the Black family in the United States has persevered in spite of incredible forces which continually pulled families apart. The extended kinships, fictive kin, community relationships, and strong ties

between women has -- through what Collins (1991) terms the "normative yardstick" of White Euro-American women's lives (46) -- been viewed as deviant from what a family "should be." (Zinn, 1990, 69-71). The "female-headedness," or "matriachal" characteristics of African American families has been openly, publicly, severely criticized; such as the 1965 Moynihan report which openly presented the "Black matriarchy" as the problem (Dill, 1996, 36; Morton, 1991, 3-5). The "Black family," criticized for its divergence from the U.S., White Patriarchal ideal of the nuclear family, must be understood in its historical context as well as present economic conditions (White, 1994); both created by the very same system which now critiques the family structures it created. The White dominant model of the family, and the separations of private family life and public work lives, is now being critiqued because it does not mirror the experiences of many Black women's lives (Collins, 1991; Collier & Yanagisako, 1987).

In addition to forced removal from their land, forced familial separation, and forced labor, many African American women were subject to sexual abuses and rape by those who claimed to own them; and this was justified through the use of many stereotypes which persist today. Stereotypes of Black women in the U.S. are various and negative. Black women have been portrayed as non-human, animalistic creatures who could not truly be violated since they did not have any human-ness to violate (Morton, 1991, 9). Black women are stereotyped in terms of sexuality, appearance, and behavior. The stereotypical "black bitch" who is "tough, domineering, emasculating, strident, and shrill" (Austin, 1997, 289) lives along side the polar stereotype of the Black mammy, wise, caring, and strong (Morton, 1991, 7, 34). Through such stereotypes Black women have been Othered from the dominant culture's value of White woman's femininity and the notion of White women as "pure."

Carby (1994) examined expressions of sexuality in songs of Black women, and discusses the themes indicating Black women's sexuality as being either unacknowledged, or hyper-acknowledged. Black women are stereotyped by a racist representation of

"primitiveness" and exoticism; Black women are not portrayed or perceived as sensual, sexual subjects, but animalistic objects (Carby, 1994, 332-333). The stereotypes of Black women's sexuality, focusing on issues of promiscuity and relating their sexuality to animals, were used to justify countless abuses of Black women's bodies (Higginbotham, 1996). It has also been proposed that the type of harassment Black women, and other Women of Color, experience are highly related to such sexual stereotypes (Cho, 1997; Davis, 1997).

De-Essentializing Women

"We now accept this "exotic" look of women of different race whose features resemble those of Europeans." -- (Black student)

Feminist theories and research have been critiqued on the basis of their racist assumptions and actions which have erroneously generalized information from White women to All women. An essentialist notion of "Woman," and an "all-inclusive sisterhood," is akin to previous U.S. notions of the "Melting Pot." Whereas the main goal of feminism is to end the oppression of women in all of its forms, to make clear and known the biases and assumptions by which every injustice is enacted against women, feminism unwittingly reproduced similar forms of exclusion by mistaking White women for All women. In so doing, feminist research has harmed many women: Women of Color, lesbian and bisexual women, women of lower socioeconomic status, women with disabilities, (among others). The recognition of this exclusion of women's differences in research, theory, and practice has led to present attempts to re-integrate, re-interpret, and re-formulate some of the "basics" of feminist ideology, research, and interpretation.

Awareness of the essentialism of woman-ness has been brought into the academy by radical Women of Color, especially Black feminist theorists and researchers, writers and poets (Espin, 1995; hooks, 1992; hooks, 1995; Lorde, 1995). Harris (1997) explains that the notion of a monolithic "women's experience" is akin to essentialist notions of race;

based on additive models of oppression, missing the interactive and multiple experience of oppression (11). Harris also proposes that essentialist theories proliferate since they are "intellectually convenient," and often seem a good remedy to "mindless pluralism." (12). It is vital to feminist research not to repeat past injustices in a different form by not accepting relativism or essentialism, but rather to include historical, economic, social and cultural conditions in research and pedagogy (Roman, 1993).

duCille (1994) asks why the importance of inclusion of African American women, and other Women of Color, is all of a sudden "being greeted as news." (603); and is concerned with the co-optation, exploitation, and commodification of Black womanhood in the "acceptance" of Black women in academia (603). Essentializing ethnicity and race are indeed serious concerns in a structure so resistant to foundational change. Radical change, however, is necessary for truly inclusive and truthful work. As Lorde (1995) poignantly states, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." One of the major new tools being used today is the notion of "multiple levels of consciousness," and multiplicative models of oppression and experience (Gilmore, 1997; Wing, 1997). This concept has been introduced not by social scientists, but by many Women of Color, and its usage in social scientific inquiry is relatively recent.

The understanding of the simultaneity of oppression, theories of multiple identities, social locations and contexts, have previously been ignored, unexamined, and buried under preferences for unified grand theories. Scientific pretenses of objectivity and neutrality have been critiqued, presenting the idea that "neutrality" feels quite different from the perspective of an "outsider." (Guinier, 1997, 75). Taken-for-granted concepts of individualism and group membership, gender and race, must now be re-examined with the complexity that such theories offer. The awareness that cognition is dependent on cultural contexts (Gordon, Miller & Rollock, 1990; Gordon, 1990), that historical and economic contexts mesh with ideologies, is to understand more fully the options and constraints on

the types of relations people can have with one another (Collier & Yanagasiko, 1987; diLeonardo, 1993; Zinn, 1990). The social scientific community of the U.S., largely occupied by White males and now many White females, has worked on the assumptions of objectivity and value-free work. These assumptions are now being recognized as being driven by very specific and value-laden concerns. The understanding of Social Psychology as a discipline which interrogates cultural assumptions and norms, has been exploded by critical race feminists to reveal a discipline deeply entrenched in, and reproducing, a variety of the very assumptions it intended to critique.

As White feminists once challenged the male-dominated fields and research findings by pointing out the unscientific generalizing of results to women from all-male subjects and investigators, the social sciences have had to relearn it's own tenets of generalizability, ethics, and interpretations of results. The breakthrough of White women into the discipline led not only to the re-reading and interpreting of past works, but to the creation of works and questions of their own. Women pioneered many presently accepted areas of research, adding richness and complexity to the research which surely would have been missed and misunderstood if gone unexamined. These breakthroughs, however, reproduced similar patterns by essentializing women; often in the name of simplifying concepts, keeping things "neat," reducing "noise." Often the essentializing of women occurred in the desire for presenting a "unified front" to challenge the Patriarchy. Often it was pure and simple ignorance, and the inability to see the complex positions and meanings of "women."

White women have been the subject of most research dedicated to "women's issues," and when Women of Color have been included into research it has often been in studies believed to be "relevant" to Women of Color; as if Women of Color were the only place to study race, the only ones effected by race, and as if they were influenced by nothing but race. Women and men of Color have often been in studies regarding prejudice

and discrimination, racial and ethnic identity, etc., but rarely have been included in any thoughtful way in the broader areas of work which dominate the social sciences.

Therefore, women and men of color have been excluded from the majority of research areas from which so many social psychological theories are created. In other words, Whiteness is seen as "normal," all else is "Other" and is only studied in relation to that Otherness. Reid and Kelly (1994) examined this focus on Women of Color by entering 24 topics into a database for psychology and found that one third of the topics entered gave less than ten abstracts for Black and African American women, and only three topics gave ten abstracts for Latinas (481). Reid and Kelly discuss the presentation of Women of Color as "anomalies," deviant from White women (483).

One of the areas from which Women of Color have been excluded is the research on women and the body (Reid and Kelly, 1994). Body image research is highly relevant for the study of social identity and one's relation to the "norm." The research that exists on body image and experience is dominated by White female participants and researchers, and the general theories on the body have been generated from the findings based on this specific population. The inclusion of Women of Color in body image research has been an important step for this area; however, since the initial theories have been based on White women, Women of Color are again put in the position of being evaluated in relation to those existing theories; becoming the Other, deviant, the anomalies that Reid and Kelly (1994) discuss. Knowing that gender and race operate differently among women, it is not scientifically reasonable to simply assume that on the dimensions of body research one is looking at the same response; nor is it feasible to assume that Women of Color simply are not subject to the same experiences of White women, and therefore are unnecessary to include in the work.

The information presently being found from the inclusion of Women in Color must add and take away from present theories. Rather than incorporating new information into

existing theories, the theories themselves must be reformulated, expanded, and made more complex.

For example, Black women in the U.S. have been found to experience their bodies differently than White women, and to be much happier with their bodies and weight than White women. Many researchers have offered the theory that Black "culture" buffers Black women from the messages of White standards of beauty. Such an interpretation can have devastating consequences if not explained, and understood, carefully; for it is based on a variety of assumptions: 1) "Black Culture" is a unified culture in and of itself, static and unchanging, an essential component of "being Black." 2) Dominant White imagery is perceived the same from the perspective of the Black woman as the White woman. 3) All Black women are viewing such images from the same perspective; i.e., all Black women are the same. The assumption of a monolithic "Black Culture," unaffected by class, sexuality, etc., as "protecting" Black women from White images and therefore body concerns, can lead to the conclusions that Black women are "OK," causing no concern, that they are protected by "their culture," and so need not be included in body image research.

Previous research (Poran, 1997) indicates that not only do Black, Latina and White women have different experiences of their bodies, but different perceptions of the social standards of the body. For example, Black women in the sample were found to be highly cognizant of racism in body imagery, while White women were completely unaware of it. Latina women were aware of both sexism and racism in the imagery, and indicated a heightened awareness of the media as a consumer-culture tool. In addition, and related to these perceptions, Black women held the highest body-esteem, while White women were low, and Latina women were the lowest. Findings from this research indicated different perceptions of culture, the body, and the cultural referents Latina, Black and White women used or perceived in relation to themselves. The finding that women perceive the cultural standards for women's bodies differently is important since it places women in

unique *relationships* with images of women; therefore, with each other and themselves. That these relationships are marked by ethnicity and race makes it important to take into consideration the positions of women as ethnic group members, as well as the relationship and positioning of their ethnic groups with larger dominant culture.

These differences should not be split into different grand theories for each ethnic group, but instead point to the social locations and influences which can effect the experience of the body and self; as well as the specific relationships with messages from the dominant culture. In the present cultural/historical moment, with the changing images of women in terms of ethnic representations, it is vital to examine body responses in relation to culture and within culture. As the images of mass culture change to include "diverse," populations, the relationships of viewers will likely change as well. The finding that social identities and social comparison processes operate differently among Latina, Black and White women -- and that these differences also are related to experience of the body -- makes the theories on social identity, social comparison, and experiences of the body important sites to investigate the meanings of such differences; and in light of these findings, existing theories must be re-evaluated and critiqued in order to come to a more complex and situated understanding of the findings.

Interpretations which overlook other areas of extreme importance, such as context of the experience of the body, contribute to the notion of White women's responses as The response by which to measure Others. African American women and other Women of Color are not focused on weight, but are focused on other areas of the body which have been socially constructed as extremely important indicators: hair and skin color. Hair and skin color has been discussed in White feminist research (Basow, 1991). Issues of body hair (legs and underarms, etc.), hair length (as indicators of femininity), and tans (indicators of status) have been presented; however, such meanings are limited to White women. It seems that since hair and skin color are not the most important indicators of

physical attractiveness to White women, such aspects of the self have been pushed to the side to make room for fat talk. For Women of Color, however, such factors take the center when discussing issues of beauty.

Hair

"Being black I suppose has made it harder. I must say I have let myself continuously relax my hair every 3 months to make it look caucasian." -- (Black student)

Since hair has not been central in White women's experiences of beauty, it has not been focused on as much as weight and has been relatively overlooked in research. For Women of Color, Black women especially, hair has serious social meanings and consequences. Here become clear the relationships between the physical being and identity; how strongly one's focus and internal experiences are so situated in culture. The history of one's social group, the representations of that group, also situated in relation to dominant culture, converge within the individual and become meaningful parts of the self. Wilson and Russell (1996) discuss Black women's experiences of hair in the U.S., and the variety of social meanings associated with hair. The major focus of Black women and hair has been on the straight and nappy. Straight hair = good, nappy hair = bad. As Wilson and Russell state, "many White women have 'bad hair' days, but do not have 'bad hair' lives." (78-79). The social construction of Black women's hair has led to many industries and actions dedicated to straightening one's hair.

The activities that Black women engage in to keep their hair are expansive, time consuming, energy consuming, and money consuming. To keep up a perm, Black women must spend approximately \$40 - \$100 dollars every 6 to 8 weeks, about twice as much money spent than White women spend on their hair (Wilson and Russell, 1996, 87). In 1992 alone, African American women represented 19% of the toiletries and cosmetics market, and bought 34% of all hair care products sold; also, they spent about three times more than other consumers on cosmetics and toiletries in a 3.9 billion dollar industry which mostly consists of hair straighteners (Rooks, 1996, 117). One's first hair

straightening perm is also considered to be a sign of entry into the world of adult women, and unfortunately also into a world of curbed activities (such as not swimming since it will ruin one's hair) (Wilson and Russell, 1996, 79-80).

Black women's hair choices are also highly political in regard to consequences of hair style choice. Black women are held politically accountable for their hair styles, and there are records of women being fired from jobs for having "offensive hair," braided hair, or "extreme and unusual" hairstyles (Caldwell, 1997, 298; Wilson & Russell, 1996, 83, 88). Self presentation is highly political, and the decision of what is, and is not, considered to be "offensive" hair is of social and political significance. Hair style and choice can effect one's career possibilities and treatment by others (Rooks, 1996).

Rooks (1996) follows the career of Madam C.J. Walker, the first woman and African American to become a millionaire in the U.S. Madame C.J. Walker employed over 100,000 African American women in her company which is credited with ads and products for hair straightening. Here beauty becomes even more complicated. As the first hair straightening perm signifies entry into the adult world of women, the beautification process itself is often presented and experienced as one which brings solidarity, bonding with other women, expressiveness of self, freedom of self-representation (Peiss, 1994, 383). Rooks (1996) points to Madam Walker's hiring of hundreds of thousands of African American women, offering employment, money, friendship, a site of working women. In addition, Rooks perceives the products themselves as offering means of agentic experiences of the self; providing a "regime" that would "allow them to fashion and meet their own standards." (47). Women could also bond through hair rituals, styling, going to the salon (a safe place to be among all women) (Peiss, 1994, 383; Rooks, 1996, 8-9).

Beausoleil (1994) also presents make-up use in terms of agentic behavior by creating the self. She discusses the preparation and maintenance as "decision making" activities, as well as bonding with other women (49). Spencer (1994) also discusses

Latinas and make-up, and presents make-up as a way for Latinas to author and define the image they present to the world. Spencer states that for Women of Color, make-up and dress are often the only vehicle available for self-expression and definition; as well as a means of masking, protecting the self from judgements of a culture which has already deemed one as an non-valued Other (74).

The importance of self-definition, authorship, and expression should not be disputed in terms of coping strategies in a harsh environment in which one is devalued; however, to focus on individual agency is often to miss the larger political and cultural influences. hooks (1995) re-politicizes hair and the choices women make in relation to a hostile culture. Black women's (continuing) history in a culture which degrades, devalues and despises them because of their existence, their created difference, makes self-loving a very important goal. The Black Power movement of the 1960's, and the Black Is Beautiful actions messages, meant reclaiming and loving the self. In accordance with the movement, a preference for the natural hair style emerged and the politics of hair was highlighted. The Black Power revolution included establishing a politics of self-representation which would "both critique and integrate ideals of personal beauty and desirability informed by racist standards...and place progressive standards" in place which would embrace a diversity of Black looks (119). The new standards would include all different complexions and colors, and expressions of Blackness (Davis, 1992, 320; hooks, 1995, 121).

This movement, however, was tightly bound by the dominant politics and culture; for in order to successfully enter "mainstream" culture, careers, etc., natural hairstyles would have to be abandoned (hooks, 1995, 122). hooks states that since freedom was defined as the right to enter mainstream society (to assume the values and/or economic status of Whites) it logically followed that interactions with the dominant culture would be on the culture's terms, thereby re-institutionalizing a system in which African Americans who were "most like White folks" in speech and appearance would find it easier to be

socially mobile (123). Such issues wound up affecting "trivial" hair concerns, transforming it from political acts of group significance to "simply a matter of choice." (123). hooks believes that the preference for the "personal choice" explanation of self-presentation is a response to the effects of integration and assimilation into "personal freedom"; racial self-hatred was now expressed in liberal individualism (124-125). hooks connection between personal appearance and social context indicates that economic distress, not abandonment of a political stance, created the environment in which Black militancy was not a viable economic survival strategy. Natural hair, African dress, all physical markers of ethnic identification would have to be left behind since they would be interpreted as signs of militancy and block entry into dominant culture (248-249).

Skin

"For a black woman, beautiful is a person who is light-skinned and has straight permed hair. If you don't fit this stereotype then you're not beautiful." -- (Black student)

"Truthfully 'beauty is' portrayed as being light-skinned with light eyes and hair." - (Latina student)

Another area of beauty and attractiveness which is not focused on in White feminist research is the issue of skin color. White women tend to focus on skin and aging, wrinkles, stretchmarks, but not color (unless it's a "healthy tan"). Because Whiteness is normalized, skin color has not been of major interest when studying beauty. Reading works by Women of Color, however, brings forth the intense awareness and presence of the cultural preference for White skin. The history of skin in the U.S. is both obvious and obscured.

The history of products for skin lightening attests to the amount of concern, time, energy and pain that has been expended in order to lighten the skin. Black women in the U.S. have used lye rubbed into the skin, acidic products, mixtures of lemon juice, urine and bleach to rub on the skin; as well as arsenic wafers to swallow (Russell, Wilson &

Hall, 1992, 50). In 1990 alone, 44 million dollars were spent on products for skin bleaching, chemical peels and dermabrasions (Russell et al., 1992, 51).

Sensitivity regarding skin color has been found among girls as young as 6, who are twice as likely as boys to be aware of the social importance of skin color (Porter, 1991). Porter (1991) studied 98 children (6-13 years old; 59 girls, 39 boys) who identified themselves as Black Americans, and found that across all age groups, the majority of children (56% girls, and 64% boys) chose very dark brown as the least preferred skin tone for children of the other gender. The preferred tones were found to vary by gender, with girls preferring honey brown, and boys preferring high yellow; in addition, reasons for this preference were different by age, with younger children (9-11) offering "desire for sameness" reasons, and 12-13 year olds stating physical attractiveness as the reasons. Interestingly, the majority of this self-selected sample (volunteering, and with parental consent) were medium-honey brown in skin tone, with very dark and very light students not participating in the study.

Color-caste hierarchies are highly gendered, with women being judged the most harshly (Harris, 1995, 82; hooks, 1995, 127); and preferences for lighter-skinned women are related to hair texture, since women offspring of mixed heritage are more likely to have long and straight hair (hooks, 1995, 127). Sororities have even been segregated by skin tone, with separate groups for light, medium and dark-skinned women (Halperin, 1995, 192). Colorism, the preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color, and giving greater value and privilege to same-race persons due to the lightness of their skin (Harris, 1995, 76) has been tied to historical accounts of lighter-skinned slaves getting lighter work and more status.

Complexion and skin tone has been found to have significant effects on stratification, with lighter-skinned persons having higher levels of occupation, education and income than darker-skinned persons (Keith & Herring, 1991). Keith and Herring (1991) discuss the historical relevance of skin tone among Black slaves, with lighter-

skinned slaves being able to work as house servants, and therefore having access to better clothing, food, shelter, the possibility of learning to read and write, as well as being exposed to the views and practices of the dominant White culture; once emancipated, these individuals were more prepared to negotiate this culture (761-763). In addition, slaves who were "fathered" by their White owners were more likely to be able to purchase their freedom (763).

Ross (1997) also discusses the histories of house-slaves as being lighter-skinned, and the high-prices attached to such lighter-skinned persons at slave auctions (506). The meanings of light/dark skin are also gendered, with lightness being equated with femininity and darkness signifying masculinity (Russell, et al., 1992, 66). Other stereotypes of skin color have included the equating of darkness with evil, immorality, and less intelligence (Harris, 1995, 76). These social-historical bases for the stratification of skin tone and status are important references in which to understand present issues of colorism; for it indicates the "preference" as being inextricably bound to a racist history which imbued meaning to a color, and gave that color meaning through social rewards or punishments.

Such socially meaningful classifications have manifested themselves differently by gender, with Black men tending to value lighter skin for Black women than Black women do for men (Ross, 1997, 506). More Black men state they would prefer dating and/or marrying women of lighter complexion; in addition, such sentiments are found to be less prevalent among those who live within a neighborhood which has high percentages of people of color (Ross, 1997). The preference for light skin has been found to exist mostly among men for women, as well as for long hair. Marriage restrictions in order to "lighten the line" have also been documented (Wilson & Russell, 1996, 74). Skin color and tone have also been found to affect the closest of relations in the family, with lighter-skinned children being treated more positively than darker-skinned children (Harris, 1995, 77; Russell et al., 1992, 95-98). In addition, 40% of Black couples adopting request light-skinned children (Russell et al., 1992,

99). From this evidence it becomes clear that skin color is not only strongly rooted in the history of slave labor, but that the hierarchy is maintained through contemporary racist and sexist meanings of light skin, beauty, and social worth.

Latinas writing on skin color also present a discourse and consciousness of lightness and darkness, hierarchies of social meanings (Moraga, 1979). Color privilege in the Latina community is historically based in colonial Spanish rule (Hurtado, 1996, 12); and many write on La Malinche as the traitor and creator of light-skinned persons of Latin descent (Alarcon, 1983). Anzaldua (1995) also discusses the tensions and stereotypes among Latinas regarding skin color, and cites classifications for "White looking Indian" as akin to "high yellow" Black women (453). Anzaldua states that such attitudes are internalized Whiteness, based on external forces of prejudice which then turn to internal oppression, finally to be acted out on one another (453). Quintanales (1983) discusses being light-skinned as both indicating privilege and invisibility, contributing to a sense of identity-less-ness. Colorism must be understood in this context, as something that has emerged from, and is dependent on, racism (Harris, 1995, 82).

Ethnicities, Bodies, and Social Contexts

The different experiences of bodies are strongly related to experiences of ethnicities. Like light bouncing and reflecting from mirror to mirror, one can see the complex interactions of self, history, present, and meanings. The larger culture, although powerful and pervasive, must be understood as a framework in which many processes are operating at once. One of the main means of culture-production is media production and consumption. The media presentations of bodies, ethnicities, and social meanings will be explored as one of the main messengers of cultural prescriptions and attitudes.

The Beautiful Race: Ads as Culture

"Beauty in the U.S. is a way of selling, to make money, and while doing this giving Real Women (NOT MODELS) the false illusions on what is Beauty. Beauty is something that sales, not a real person. Men and Women are Being used for their

Attractiveness in order to make Other people want to Look or dress like. Beauty for this culture is nothing more than an illusion that get plastered on every Bus, subway, highway and every where in between. Designer make their design for only then young and Tall female, the same for men. What are the shorter, slightly Over Weight of every Body else going to do. Beauty is over rated and misunderstood." -- (Latina student)

"The Black ones [mannequins] are conformers and they are often the ones that confuse the majority of my black sisters. They believe that this is what they need to look like to be accepted and if they don't they often times feel inferior." -- (Black student)

In U.S. ideology, agency and structure are posed against one another as if the two were impenetrable opposites rather than fluid parts of a process (Sewell, 1992, 2-4). Personal agency has been split from political and historical components of the agent, reducing social and economic forces to "personal problems." (Martin-Baro, 1994, 19). Many studies have indicated that recognizing social forces, such as the prejudices of others, can have a positive and protective effect (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa & Major, 1991; Crocker & Major, 1989, Major, Schiacchitano & Crocker, 1993; Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine & Broadnax, 1994). Ads, however, are designed specifically to prevent this type of awareness, and are geared towards making the structural appear "natural."

Russell, Wilson and Hall (1992) state that the "desire for lighter skin is nearly universal," (41); with a unidirectional preference among all women in the U.S. for blond hair and blue eyes (Wilson & Russell, 1996, 93). This "universal" desire is matched by a U.S. universal of oppression and racism. Mass media plays a key role in defining cultural tasks, locating the self in history, and ascertaining national and social possibilities as well as interpersonal relations (Mantsios, 1995). Ads, often trivialized in social debate and discussion, must be viewed as historical documents which serve the purpose of providing models, information, and reflecting the constructions and values of culture; ads are "public disseminators for private behavior" (Rooks, 1996, 11, 98). T.V., film, advertisements, etc., are not only messages of social meanings; but this meanings proliferate needs,

interests, commitments, and aid in defining identity through the negation of others (McCarthy et al., 1997).

Beauty culture in the U.S. is based on a democratic ideal of appearance in which exterior and interior transformations are connected through products (Kilbourne, 1995; Peiss, 1994). In order to successfully sell and appeal to a mass public, the media depends on the creation and maintenance of a sense of "oneness," and the "we" in this oneness is upper middle class Whiteness (Manstios, 1995, 412). Consumerism as culture, creating "commodified self-concepts," creates ads which are not only aimed at selling products but sells through messages of fulfilling needs, or being subject to social isolation, embarrassment, and Otherness (Murphy & Miller, 1997).

Jones (1992) views the sense of "we" as being created and maintained by Othering; and discusses Black women's roles as being narrowly defined to "bitch" and "ho." Jones calls these "accusatory images," and that these images can have strong influences on internalization of racist attitudes. The average Black household, Jones continues, watches 11 hours of T.V. per day, and make up nearly 5 times their proportion in the population at movie theatres (97). hooks (1995) also critiques the media industry as the best place to "colonize the minds and imaginations" of African Americans (109). T.V. and mass media are viewed as "neo-colonial weapons" which shape the minds of all who watch it (109-111). Peiss (1994), in her discussion of the U.S. cosmetics industry, states that the market itself is divided into three categories: 1) "class"/high priced, 2) "mass"/lower priced, and 3) "ethnic" markets which are directed specifically towards Women of Color.

As early as the 1890's, advertisements were focused toward Black women for hair straightening products and skin lighteners. Titles of products, such as "Black-No-More," and "Tan-Off," were prevalent; and bleach creams were marketed to White women as well, until the 1920's when sunbathing became a symbol of social status (Peiss, 1994, 388). The connection to status through products -- White women tanning, Black women

lightening -- is one that is often overlooked in the study of beauty. The ability to change one's appearance, for example, is quite costly. One can change hair texture, eye color, nose shape, eye shape, and so on, if one can afford it; therefore, not only does the ability to change one's appearance rely on one's financial status, but it also reifies, or elevates, that status.

Status elevation through "beauty," is accomplished through the negation of difference among women. Most of the surgeries that women seek reproduce the Euro-American standard, they do not diverge from it. Another interesting question is, for example, what the children of surgically altered parents will feel in relation to their ethnic identities and physical selves? The women in Kaw's study who changed their eyes...such changes do not then get genetically transmitted. Montoya (1997) writes about *trenzas* (braids) and being *grenudas* (uncombed). *Trenzas*, she writes, are part of her public self, a cultural disguise in dualized worlds. All may wear masks, but there is a fundamental difference if one is masked because one is a member of one or more oppressed groups. There are masks of acculturation, masks of self-hate, forced masking; and when one is oppressed, one cannot always choose when to be unmasked, sometimes you are unmasked involuntarily, forcefully, unexpectedly. Such products and institutions will continually survive on themselves through the masking of others, since in the present sexist and racist culture they will always be "needed." Their service to the culture is to continue to deny difference among women.

Modeling Colors

"I was surprise to see to Black mannequins. I honestly never really saw one before." -- (Black student)

"I didn't think that they were really beautiful, but I found myself looking more at them because they seemed to be my race." -- (Black student)

"These mannequins look the same way that they make black barbie dolls. I have never seen a black women look that way before. They try to give a specific skin tone which looks like mud. Where are they getting these images from." -- (Black student)

Models, one of the most popular selling tools, have quickly attained celebrity status in U.S. culture. They are "used" to advertise far more than clothes, and the ideals they sell become increasingly cloaked in a feigned attempt of diversity. As academic and research models of multiculturalism tend to essentialize "Women of Color" -- (even using such a term is an offensive abbreviation) -- women represented as "ethnic" models do more to squelch diversity than expand it. Although there are more models of Color than ever before, they tend to resemble the typical Euro-American White standard. Most popular "ethnic" models tend to have fair skin, wear weaves, wigs, or bonded hair (hooks, 1995, 128). Ads in *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Essence* were analyzed between 1985-1987, and 1/3 of of these ads were for hair care products, using fair-skinned models (Russell, et al., 1992, 47). Most models "of Color" are light-skinned, have European facial features, are thin, and are often used for specifically "ethnic" clothing lines or selling points (Wilson & Russell, 1992, 261). There have been many "advancements" for women of color in areas of modeling, beauty pageants, *Playboy*, even the *Rockettes* (the first Black dancer was hired in 1987 as an alternate) (Russell, et al., 1992, 154); however, the "inclusion" of women of various ethnicities into an inherently sexist and racist institution may be disputed as progress.

Spencer (1994) writes of themes in Chicana poetry which indicate the struggles in two Patriarchal cultures in America; under the umbrella of White images in which Women of Color are "virtually erased from the general consciousness." (76). Models have been written about as "passive tools of manipulation," and the recognition of the body as commodity is repeated in themes of mirrors and identity (74-77). Popular images rely on the commodification of gender, race and class (Peiss, 1994), and the new "diversity" may be leading instead to a highly essentialized presentation of beauty and race.

duCille (1996) studied the history of "ethnic" Barbie dolls. Not only does she critique the indoctrination of Black girls into such a particular notion of femininity -- one which helped to shape White girls and eating disorders (26) -- but she also questions what it means when a doll tells a girl that she can be "Black like me." (22). duCille asks how one makes a doll that looks like a natural woman? How does one make "ethnic" dolls without recreating essentialist notions of race and beauty? The colors and "ethnic" features used by toymakers to denote Blackness raise crucial questions regarding the commodification of race and the manufacturing of difference (22).

The inclusion of different ethnicities in toy world, the corporate production of images of women, may not necessarily signify "advancements." duCille counters the notion of progress by reminding readers that Black women who have "made it" as models, in beauty pageants, etc., do not have afros or cornrows or dreadlocks; rather, the commercial beauty culture has never truly presented Blackness as beautiful but "capitalism has appropriated what it sees as certain signifiers of blackness and made them marketable." (27). Presentations of Black women through such dolls reproduce stereotyped forms of racial and ethnic difference, while simultaneously denying difference (i.e. the melting pot of plastic Barbies); it adds to the order rather than "changing the mold." (37-38).

The "race" of a toy must be reducible to common re-producible colors and costumes in order for mass production (47); this production will inevitably contribute to race essentialism. Even if the dolls have "fuller lips, broader noses, wider hips and butts," still they essentialize a Black physique and re-enforce the notion of race as not difference but sameness within ethnic groups (50, 129). Black barbie does not have an afro but long, straight (although dark) hair; and duCille points out that this continues the construction of the ugly, nappy, wild and wooley hair that Black girls and women have had to struggle with on and in their heads (51-52).

Meeting the Oppositional Gaze

"They couldn't possibly represent me or pose as competition because I am young, gifted and Black!" -- (Black student)

bell hooks' (1992) writing on the Oppositional Gaze of Black women viewers of cinema presents the relationships between viewer and viewed; and the identities which are both presented and critiqued, identifiable and unidentifying. hooks writes about the oppositional gaze as the way Black women view media images in the awareness of their racist content. The White Supremacist imagery of White-dominated cinema, she writes, makes stark the Othered sense of Black womanhood which is represented there. When viewing such images the oppositional gaze is one of critique, of awareness, a distanced and distinct position in which ones relationship with cinematic images is substantively unique. If the main goal of media imagery is to elicit a sense of "we," that "we-ness" has been actively opposed by Black women spectators; and, in addition, that oppositional gaze is made possible by the fact that Black women are Othered on the screen.

hooks writes that to stare at the screen is to witness the negation of Black representation, the denial of the being of the Black woman (117-118). This absence, this erasure, is what makes identification with the images an impossibility (119). Identification is made on the bases of recognition, of a sense of sameness or belonging, and the images that are presented by the media do not foster such a sense. The gaze, Black Looks, is a response to such negations and obvious unidentifiers, which positions Black women in a critiquing stance. To fully "experience the pleasure" of cinema, hooks writes, Black women must look away, prevent this gaze, forget racism (120). hooks states that Black women consciously resist identification with films and White womanhood, since identification is disabling and disempowering (121-122).

Blatant racist imagery is an assault, a force with specific messages; and as long as those messages are indeed blatant, the oppositional gaze will counter it. The conceptualization of Black women's gaze as socially situated is vital if one is to understand the relationships between women and media presentations of women. hooks writes, "The

extent to which black women feel devalued, objectified, dehumanized in this society determines the scope and texture of their looking relations." (127). An oppositional gaze is developed through resistance, and one's identity as inseparable from that resistance. Without this look of resistance one's perceptions of reality, the self, and one's being, the mind will become colonized, and so will one's relationship to such images.

It is through hooks' description of the oppositional gaze that the body, and feelings with and within the body, come into their fullness. Women's bodies are marked through their histories, their communities, their identities with/through others and themselves. Women of Color are not "buffered" and safe from White dominant imagery by fixed cultural differences; rather, these very cultural differences are constantly created and maintained from within and without. When any part of the dynamic changes, the relationships between the person and culture will change as well. Hair and skin, body weight and size, can only be understood in relation to ethnicity and how ethnic identity has been formed, maintained, re-created. If identity is formed as an oppositional gaze against dominant culture while aligned to subculture, and this gaze is one which recognizes the messages of media and analyses them, the force of the dominant imagery may be weakened or at least negotiated through subcultural images. Its effects are different. The representations of women in popular culture are meaningful, hold meaning; *how* they mean, how that meaning is experienced is, however, processed and made into sense through the viewer.

Spectators may be passive or active, identification with images are situated in one's relation with the images; in other words, the messages have meaning, and the viewer is meaningful. Social location of the viewer will effect the responses and experiences with dominant images. The histories of Women of Color in the U.S. make clear the unique positioning of media watchers, as well as the psychological responses in relation to those images. The situated meanings of ethnicities and identities are where relationships with images become meaningful. Ethnicity and gender, as two of the main social categories

imposed on individuals, get meaning from that imposition. Social identities and social comparisons are imposed, while the manifestations of these processes are highly dependent on the relationships between claimed identity and representations of identities. The social comparisons of Women of Color in response to images of White women must therefore be situated in histories and contemporary struggles; while recognizing that the massive force of mass media representations will influence the relationship between the viewer and the viewed.

As the images begin to change, to "include" and colonize essentialist images of Women of Color, the previously stark contrast between the exclusively White image and Women of Color spectators will likely become blurred. The obviousness will fade, perhaps making the oppositional gaze more and more difficult to achieve. The active non-identification with White imagery may be softened as Women of Color seem to be included; their inclusion feigning to signify a non-racist media. As these images change, so will the relationship between the viewed and the viewer. As these relationships change, so may the experience of the self and ethnic identity, the body, one's being.

Presently images from the dominant culture are being re-presented, sending new messages and presentations of, to, and about Women of Color. A major force in our culture, these representations may be creating a new dynamic, a new relationship. Will these images mark a change not only in the dominant representations but also subcultural relationships to the dominant culture? Will these shifting images create shifts among and within women? How will these representations of women's bodies exist with, or transform, the relationships that Women of Color have with their ethnic and bodily identities? These are vital questions which, if they are to be explored, must be examined now as these shifts begin.

A very possible outcome, if these images are not actively countered and challenged, is that Women of Color will soon "measure down" on the body image scales designed for White women. If Women of Color are incorporated into the pre-existing

structure, and begin to see themselves represented in that structure, their relationships with those images may come closer to the relationships that White women presently have. It is very possible that if such a similar relationship between Women of Color and representations of the body occur, Women of Color may then be more likely to engage in the types of body cognitions that White women presently engage in; perhaps Women of Color will begin to feel negatively towards their bodies, their weight, and begin defining beauty less in terms of personality and more in terms of body. Latinas seem to engage in such cognitions, and it must be questioned why (Poran, 1997). Such responses must be investigated, the intricate relationships and experiences of ethnicity and identification must be studied in their complexity, and the larger social representations of women must be radically altered.

Without the restructuring of the images from inside out, without changing a sexist and racist structure, inclusion will only signify the reproduction of sexism and racism in new forms; and if gone unnoticed, social psychology will find itself revealing those forms years from now, through more studies and theories, belatedly uncovering and documenting the harms of the changed faces of injustice. The discipline of Social Psychology must not contribute to such an occurrence through its research practices and theories. To restructure these methods, and to make them explicitly focused on the social locations and relationships of individuals within culture, is the only way to create a discipline which looks and learns through an oppositional gaze.

Research Questions

Previous research (Poran, 1997) indicates that not only do Latina, Black and White women experience their bodies differently (with Black women having the highest body satisfaction of all groups), but are unique in their "readings" of dominant-popular imagery. For example, Black women in the sample were found to be highly cognizant of racism in body imagery, and Latinas focused on issues of both sexism and racism in the imagery, and had a heightened awareness of the media as a selling-tool. This work also explored ethnic identification and the tendency to engage in social comparison processes with dominant representations of women. This research utilized pre-designed scales and measures through which to gather information and, although useful, was considered limited in scope and meaning by the researcher; as was the theory-driven approach the study was based on. Therefore, in order to further explore the relationships of women, ethnic identity, the body, and social imagery, the following study was designed through a generative-theory approach. The questions used to guide the research were:

1. How do Latina, Black, and White women experience their bodies?
2. How do Latina, Black, and White women perceive and experience images of women from U.S. fashion magazines?
3. Is ethnic identity of participant related to the experience of such imagery?
4. Are women's experiences of their bodies related to the representations of ethnicity in U.S. magazines?

These questions are highly exploratory and non-predictive; although based on theoretical and political concerns. Grounded theory, as explained by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is the attempt to ground theory in social research itself; generating theory from data rather than simply trying to verify theories. It is proposed that studies with the objective of verification may miss many complex and rich meanings in the data, as well as falsely conclude that a particular theory "fits" the data, or vice versa. It has typically been the academic habit to divorce theory from data, and method from theory; this research is

based on the grounded theory approach, and conceptualizes theory as process and emergent. The conceptual categories and their properties which emerge from the data are considered interconnected with theory (p.228) rather than evidence which "proves" or "disproves" specific hypotheses. The following research, therefore, is considered a point-in-process, opening as many questions as it may answer.

Method

Research Design

The research questions were explored through multiple methodologies. Participants engaged in filling out questionnaires, focus groups, and drawing activities. To explore the first question on how Latina, Black and White women experience their bodies, participants were asked to write stories on a time they were aware of their body; and asked to write what they loved and hated about their bodies. To gain information on the participants themselves, and perhaps their ethnic identification (question #3), participants were asked to write ten words which they felt described them.

To explore the questions (#s 2, 3, and 4) regarding participants' perceptions and experiences of U.S. magazine imagery, and the relationships of those perceptions to ethnic identity, focus group discussions were conducted. The focus group method was chosen since it allows for conversation, rather than categorization, through which participants and researcher can explore together the issues under study and produce "interactive data" (Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan, 1993; Reinhartz, 1994). This method calls for collaboration among participants, and so participants work together to form conclusions.

This tendency towards consensus, however, should not be misinterpreted as an indicator of unified group response. Instead, the focus group discussions are understood as indicative of how individuals can collaborate with one another, and the processes through which individuals can come to conclusions as a group. In addition, with the knowledge of different speech patterns among women and men from varying ethnic groups (Filardo, 1996; Henley, 1995), the present research held focus groups which were

homogeneous by ethnicity. This choice was made in order for all participants to feel free to speak, rather than designing heterogeneous groups which would likely silence the voices of many participants.

Focus group discussions were facilitated by the researcher and a co-facilitator; with the objective being collective explorations of the subjects which participants offered and deemed central. Through the grounded theory approach, participants not only directed conversations within their own groups; but through their discussions, questions, and assertions, informed the method of focus groups which would follow. This process is considered to be vital to this research; interpretations of data were central to the focus group discussions themselves, and allowed for a generative and emergent process throughout the studies duration.

Sample

53 women participated in focus groups (19 Latina, 15 Black, and 19 White women). All participants were traditional college age students. Participants varied in body shape and weight, as well as skin tone and shade. These participants were recruited from a New York City college participant pool. Although not explicitly measured, based on the demographics of the student population at the college it is likely that the majority of participants were from working class backgrounds. Sign-up sheets were posted which indicated the dates and times for each group, with the brief title of the research as "focus group: the body," as well as a description which indicated that there would be written portions and discussion.

Materials

The materials utilized for this study consisted of audio-tape recording equipment, a pamphlet-style questionnaire, notecards, and poster-boards upon which were displayed images of women in popular/dominant media. In addition, large pieces of beige paper and a variety of colored markers and crayons were used.

Procedures

Nine focus groups were run in groups of 3 to 8 participants per group. Three groups of Latinas, three groups of Black women, and three groups of White women were organized through participant pool sign up sheets. Each focus group lasted no more than two hours.

The focus groups were run by the researcher and a co-facilitator who was demographically similar to the participants in the group (note: session 9 was only run by the researcher since the co-facilitator had to attend to an unforeseen personal emergency). Since the primary investigator is a White woman, it was considered beneficial for the participants' comfort level to have a facilitator with whom they could potentially identify by racial/ethnic heritage. In addition, it was expected to be beneficial for the researcher to have a facilitator who could identify more with the participants and issues of which the researcher may not be aware. The co-facilitator took written notes during the discussions, and aided in the discussion process when she felt it necessary to do so.

It should be noted that the presence of a White researcher, who would then be writing about Latina and Black participants, is assumed to have created a very specific environment in which these focus group conversations took place. The presence of the researcher as the primary "listener" is considered an integral part of the research relationship, process, and presentation (Fine, 1994). In addition, the information gathered through this research attempts to explore the complexities of experiences among women through dialogue with participants, rather than trying to speak about, on, or for the participants in this study (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996).

Upon the participants arrival, it was verbally explained to the group that their participation in the study was voluntary, that their anonymity was ensured, and they could cease participation at any time without penalty. With participant consent, the sessions were audio-taped; participants were also informed that it was their option to listen to the tape and have any of their comments removed from the transcription process. It was also

clearly stated that the audio-taping would proceed throughout the discussion session. Finally, participants were assured that only the researcher herself would listen to the tapes, and that the transcriptions would be used in the research. In addition, participants were informed that they would receive a debriefing form (see Appendix A) upon completion of the study.

The focus groups centered on questions of the body, experiences of the body in relation to the dominant culture's images of women, and representations of ethnicity in the media. In addition, the members of the groups were encouraged to pose their own questions and concerns regarding the body and what they believe to be the most pressing issues of the moment. The information obtained through these sessions were analyzed thematically as topics emerged from the data; with specific attention given to information on ethnic identity and the body.

Measures

Participants entered a small room in which they arranged themselves at a table. Each participant received a folded pamphlet-style questionnaire (see Appendix B).

The focus group sessions were organized into 6 parts: 1) written story/author information, 2) notecards, 3) discussion of notecards, 4) discussion of images, 5) open-ended questions, and 6) collaborative drawing.

Written Story/About The Author

Story

First, participants were asked to write a story about their bodies on the first page of the pamphlet. Participants were asked through written instruction to imagine a time when they were very aware of their bodies, in a positive or negative way, and to write about that time through their own perspective, the perspective of another, or the perspective of their body or body part. Participants were given approximately 5 minutes to write their story.

These stories were analyzed thematically, for specific word usage, and for perspectives chosen; and were examined for themes within and between groups. Story themes were coded into categories as they emerged from the data. Story themes, or central topics of the participant's written recollections, created the codes through which the stories were analyzed. Each story was read and examined for the central topic. When each story had been read and coded for the central topic of the story, stories were then grouped into categories based on the similarity of these topics. These story topics were then conceptualized as indicating themes which could be discerned through the presence, and prevalence, of the shared story foci.

Two main themes emerged from the written stories. The topics of the stories tended to focus on issues of weight/body and puberty. Stories were then coded into one of these two main thematic categories: 1) weight/body, and 2) puberty. Stories were coded into the weight/body category when the main topic of the story focused on weight gain or a change of physical shape. Stories were coded into the puberty category when the story focused on issues of puberty, physical change, and menstruation.

In addition to the themes of weight/body and puberty, two other sub-categories were created by the prevalence of information on age and other people in the stories. All stories were then coded by: 1)age, and 2) the presence or absence of other people. Stories were coded for mentions of age or grade in school. Stories were also coded for information of other people as the trigger for personal physical awareness.

Finally, the stories were also coded into categories regarding 1) perspective chosen, and 2) descriptions of the experience. Only two perspectives were used: first person and third person. The descriptions of the experiences written about were coded into one of four categories which emerged from the data: 1) only negative (when the story explicitly stated the recollection of a negative experience); 2) only positive (when stories explicitly focused on a positive experience); 3) negative to positive (when stories indicated a transition from a past negative experience to a presently positive one); and 4)

negative to neutral (when stories described a transition from past negative feelings to presently neutral ones).

Author

Upon completion of the story, participants were asked to give ten (10) words which they would use to describe themselves. This "about the author" section provided information regarding the participants' sense of themselves, and what they consider to be important aspects of their identities. While this section provided limited demographic information, it provided useful information regarding personal characterizations and what themes were common among, or divergent between, the ethnic groups.

The words that participants used to describe themselves were collapsed into four categories: 1) inner/character traits, 2) outward focused traits, 3) body descriptions, and 4) cultural/social roles. Words were coded into the inner/character trait category when they described traits which resided in the individual, with no specific relation to an Other (i.e., intelligent, hardworking). Words were coded into the outward focused traits category when they described traits which gain their meaning through relationships with other people (i.e., friendly, caring). Words which described body parts or body descriptions (such as pretty, tall/short) were coded into the body descriptions category. Finally, words which indicated social/cultural roles (such as student, marital status) were coded into the last category. All categories were also analyzed for shared and/or divergent themes by ethnicity/race of participants.

Notecards

After the participants completed the "about the author" section, 3X5 notecards were handed out to each individual. Participants were asked to write anonymously what they love about their bodies on the left side of the card, and what they hate about their bodies on the right side of the card. This activity lasted approximately 5 minutes. After the cards were filled out, participants handed them back to the researcher who shuffled the cards and redistributed them to the participants.

Frequencies for all words mentioned were computed, as well as their placement in the love/hate categories. In addition, words were coded into the category of 1) parts or 2) instrumentality. Words which described body parts or characterizations of the body were coded into the parts category. Words which indicated action, what the body could *do*, were coded into the instrumentality category. Finally, the words in all categories were analyzed for within and between group similarities and differences. Some words were found to be shared by all three ethnic groups, and some were found to be unique to each.

Focus Group Discussions

Discussion of Notecards

Once redistributed, the cards were read aloud by participants and discussed. Exploration of the meanings of the participants' answers was encouraged. Participants varied in the length of time they took to discuss the notecards, and were allowed to "fade out" on their own before the images were presented to them for discussion.

Discussion of Images

Participants were provided with advertising/fashion images on poster-board. A total of twelve 11"X14" poster-boards, each with 5-12 images, were laid out on the table (See Appendices M - X). Participants were encouraged to stand up, pass them around, and look at all boards. The images were chosen by the researcher from a variety of popular U.S. magazines. There were 100 images in total (28 Latina, 30 Black, 39 White, 3 Asian). There were 2 main categories of images: 1) stereotypical and 2) alternative. All images in the stereotypical category came from product advertisements or clothing/fashion advertisements. The alternative category included images of women not from such advertisements.

The stereotypical category consisted of 9 poster-boards (n=73). Five (5) of the poster-boards were comprised of forty-four (44) images of Latina, Black, and White women which are stereotypical -- representative of the types of overly thin images seen in fashion magazines -- and included top fashion-models on runways and in advertisements.

The remaining four (4) boards were also comprised of these stereotypical images; however, each board visually isolated the racial/ethnic groups. There was one "Black" poster-board, consisting of images of Black women only, predominantly from magazines which are targeted towards African American women; one Latina poster-board, consisting of only Latin women, predominantly from magazines which are targeted towards Latinas; and one "White" poster-board, with only White women, predominantly from magazines targeted towards White women. The fourth board consisted of images which were varied in skin-tone and shade, as well as ethnicity (i.e, a very tan White woman, a light-skinned Black woman, a dark-skinned Black woman, light-skinned Latina, etc.).

The alternative category consisted of 3 poster-boards upon which were mounted images (n=27) of women who do not represent the stereotypical fashion-model look. Two (2) of the poster- boards were of large women modeling clothes for "women's" fashions. The third board was comprised of a variety of images of women which are not related to fashion. For example, a bald woman, older women, women engaging in sports activities, large women not modeling or advertising clothing, etc.

All poster-boards were labeled (A - L), and all images numbered, in order for quick identification by participants. Participants did not need much, if any, prodding to discuss the images. Participants wound up directing the discussions more than was expected. Participants were encouraged in their chosen topics of discussion, and many of the researchers' questions were responses to the groups assertions and ideas.

The discussions lasted for varying lengths of time, but far surpassed the anticipated 15 minutes! Each group's discussion time was approximately one and a half hours long. The discussions were collective explorations of the images and were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed for information which emerged from the data.

The transcribed discussions were mapped for themes and topics which emerged during the notecard discussion and the discussion of the imagery. Each discussion group was analyzed separately, explored for key topics, words, themes, flow of subject matter

and topic shifts. Once each group had been analyzed separately, discussion groups were then examined in relation to one another, and analyzed for topics and themes, shared and unique. The process of discussion analyses was repeated until the researcher was sure that all topics evident to her in any one discussion were examined for their presence or absence in any other discussion.

The topics discussed were then analyzed for thematic relationships among them; topics were examined in relation to one another in order to discern the larger themes which they signified. Through this process two main themes emerged: 1) Media, and 2) Social Comparison. The discussions were then reconceptualized as comprised of these two main themes (Media and Social Comparison), and the topics covered as components of these themes.

The major theme of the Media consisted of 4 main component conversations: 1) feelings of pressure from the media; 2) critiques of weight, models and selling with sex; 3) awareness of exploitation and misrepresentation; and 4) responses to the alternative imagery. All of these component conversations are analyzed for shared gender-themes, as well as divergent and unique themes associated with ethnicity/race.

The Social Comparison theme which emerged from the data is comprised of two main components: 1) Awareness of judgements and comparisons in relation to specific others (men, women, and family); and 2) the perceptions of those comparisons as personally and/or socially motivated. These themes and component conversations are also analyzed for the shared gender-themes and the divergent themes by ethnicity/race.

Open-ended Questions

After participants chose to finish the discussion, participants were asked to turn to the next page of the pamphlet (Appendix B) and write their responses to the discussion of the images. Participants were encouraged to write what struck them in the discussion, to write what perhaps they did not wish to share with the group, and to state what kinds of questions they would ask other women. The last page was offered for the participants to

write any other responses they had to the session. Analyses of these questions are not included in the research results as they do not further inform the data.

Collective Drawing

When all participants finished filling out the pamphlets, they handed them back to the researcher. The researcher then provided a box of colored crayons and markers, and participants' attention was directed to a large piece of 3' X 8' beige paper which hung on the back wall of the room. Participants were asked to draw, as a group, "How they envision a healthy woman of the 21st century." This activity provided information on the participants' perceptions of a healthy woman, as well as providing them with the opportunity to engage in a fun group act. Anticipating that some of the earlier poster-board images might be depressing or stressful for the women, this collective action was intended to empower the participants through the creation of an image; rather than having the session focus only on the receiving of cultural images. When the participants believed the image was completed, the picture itself was discussed as the researcher asked "who is she?," and the woman was discussed. The drawing activity definitely seemed to accomplish its task as a spirit-lifter since there was a lot of laughter and discussion; and although the images and discussions are interesting, they are not included in the research results section. The drawings, and the discussions of the drawings, are a study in themselves; they are not reported in this research.

Finally, the researcher held a debriefing session with the group in which the theories guiding the study were discussed more in depth, and the participants had the opportunity to voice any questions or comments they had. The majority of participants did not have further questions, and seemed quite talked out. Participants were given a debriefing form which included references of interest.

Overview of Analyses and Presentation of Results

The research to be presented is an attempt to integrate the theoretical bases for the work and the theories which emerged from the work itself. Rather than hypothesis

testing, this work is considered to be theory guided; since this work itself is based on a critique of the applications of theories based on White women and then applied to all women. The research itself was guided by theoretical concerns, however the methodology and participants' responses are considered to inform the theory. Because the goal of this work is a massive reconceptualization of issues of the body and ethnicity/race, attention is paid to the meta-themes which emerged from the data; therefore, the results are presented thematically.

The main themes, or stories, which emerged in all areas of the data indicated one of two frameworks: 1) gendered themes which were shared across all groups, and 2) themes which were distinct on the basis of ethnicity/race of participants and groups. These shared and distinctive themes may provide more information regarding the gender imperatives and stereotypes all women are expected to embody; and the sub- or parallel stereotypes which complicate the notion of gender as uniform for all women.

The main findings of this research will be presented in three main sections (Body, Imagery, and Social Comparison) in accordance with the stated research questions and findings. The first section of results (Body) will focus on the first question, which asked how Latina, Black, and White women experience their bodies. The first two measures (Story/About the Author, and Notecards) will be discussed in relation to this question; in addition, other unexpected themes will be presented and discussed. This section not only provides information on how women feel towards their own bodies, and offers insight into ethnicity and self-perception; but is integral to situate, relate, and make sense of the information which follows in the discussions.

The second section of results (Imagery) will be discussed in relation to the following questions: 2) The perceptions and experiences of the imagery; 3) ethnic identification; and 4) the experience of the body in relation to ethnic representations of women. The focus group discussions are analyzed and presented in order to explore these questions. The shared gender-themes of participant's perceptions of the imagery will

be discussed; as well as the themes which indicated unique intellectual critiques or responses to the imagery. Themes which indicated awareness of social structure, especially the critique or acceptance of social standards, will be central to this section.

The third section of results will focus on issues of **Social Comparison**. Although **Social Identity Theory** and **Social Comparison** theories comprised much of the theoretical reasoning behind the research itself, the psychology of social comparison unexpectedly became an overt focus of the conversation offered by participants. The research itself was guided by theories of social comparison processes, with a focus on social comparison in relation to the dominant cultural imagery in women's magazines and ethnic identity; however, the participants offered social comparison as a response which is engendered in *relation* to these images, but *centralized* in day-to-day interactions with others. This section will provide further information on the intricacies of body experience, and how these experiences are perceived by participants to be related to social structure and personal lived experience.

Results

Section One: The Body

Story

Participants were asked to write a story of a time when they were aware of their body, in a positive or negative way, and from any perspective they chose. All but one of the participants ($N=53$) chose to write the story from their own perspectives ($f=52$, 98.11%). The majority of the central themes in the stories included negative descriptions of the experiences ($f=33$, 62.26%), with 19 (35.85%) of the stories only negative, and 6 (11.32%) only positive. Some stories recounted a negative incident from the past, but made it clear that they no longer had those feelings presently: 8 (15.10%) discussing a transition from negative to positive, and 6 (11.32%) stories indicating a transition from negative feelings of the body to a more neutral relationship.

The types of descriptions in the stories indicated either negative or neutral stories as the most prevalent; however, these are distributed differently among the ethnic groups in the sample. White women ($n=19$) were the most likely to indicate a negative experience ($f=14$, 80.70%), as well as only a negative experience of their body ($f=9$, 47.37%); while Latina participants ($n=19$) were also likely to describe their experiences as only negative ($f=6$, 31.58%), but were more likely to make a transition to a presently neutral relationship with their bodies ($f=10$, 52.64%). Black women ($n=15$) also indicated negative relationships with the body ($f=8$, 53.34%), but were more likely to indicate the transition to, and/or only, presently positive attributions ($f=4$, 26.67%) or neutral experiences of their bodies ($f=7$, 46.67%) (See Table 1, Appendix C).

The main themes of the stories centered around issues of weight and parts of the body ($f=19$, 35.85%) and puberty/bodily changes ($f=21$, 39.62%). These main gender-themes of weight and puberty, however, were not evenly distributed among the participants. Latinas ($n=19$) were the most likely to focus on stories of puberty ($f=10$, 52.63%), Black women's stories ($n=15$) were more evenly spread among the categories, and White women ($n=19$) tended to write stories on issues of weight ($f=9$, 47.37%) (See Table 2, Appendix D).

Within these larger themes there were also the components of age, other people, and weight. For example, even if a main theme of a story was the experience of puberty, there were components *within* the story which may have included the age of puberty, the responses of others to one's changing body, and the weight gain which often accompanies puberty. All participants' stories ($N=53$) were examined for these "component themes." The majority of participants ($f=32$, 60.38%) wrote of a specific age, grade, or time which marked for them the changes in their bodies or attitudes towards their bodies. An equal amount of participants ($f=32$, 60.38 %) had Others in their stories; writing about the effects of other people's comments on their own perceptions of themselves, as well as the effects of comparing with other people. In addition, although weight as a central theme in

the stories was not evenly distributed by ethnicity of participant, the majority of participants in all groups did include weight as a component of their stories ($f=34$, 64.15%) (See Table 3, Appendix E). In other words, the main themes of stories were different by ethnic group, with White women focusing their stories on weight, Latinas on puberty (Table 2D); however, many of the component elements in the stories were shared among the groups and mentioned in their stories (Table 3E).

Weight

All three groups mentioned weight gain as a central theme ($f=19$, 35.85%) in their stories, however White women ($n=19$) were the most likely to discuss weight as the central theme of their stories ($f=9$, 47.37%) and were the most definitively negative ($f=9$, 47.37%). Often words and statements which indicate the American fetish of individualism and will-power were included, providing further examples of the well-documented tendency for White women in the United States to equate issues of the body with a sense of control or lack thereof. Many of these stories also mentioned the experience of the negative feelings being precipitated by others' comments and through comparison with others. [All transcriptions to follow have been copied exactly from their original texts, including misspellings; all italics are added by the researcher in order to highlight themes and components in the stories. Excerpts have been chosen by the researcher on the basis of 1) their representativeness of the category or topic being presented and 2) the illustrative clarity of the excerpt].

White women's written stories:

-It was the time I was around *seven* years old. All of a sudden I started to getting chubbier and chubbier. I remember looking at the mirror and seeing this fat, tall girl. I was very unhappy with the way I looked but I loved to eat a lot and *couldn't help myself*.

-Well when I was in the *9th grade* of junior High school I became very self-conscious about my weight & I guess my whole body itself. I thought I was very fat & I hated my breasts (I still feel the same exact way today!) Even though I was only *14* I joined the gym to try & lose the weight. I did lose it but after a year I began to *slack off* & I've gained the weight back & more plus a more negative outlook on my body.

-I've always been aware of my body. I think I'm more self conscious now about my body now than I've ever been. I think my thighs are like super fat and I have started not to fit into my clothes and every time I go on a diet I always gain my weight back. I have two girlfriends who are super skinny and they complain about their weight and how they have to lose weight for the summer. That makes me feel like an elephant *compared* to them. I just wish I can lose the weight before we go to the beach.

These stories are familiar in their tone and language in relation to previous work on body imagery and perceptions of the self among White women (Cash & Henry, 1995; Parker et al., 1995). White participants wrote of such stories, focusing on the issues of weight gain and a negative experience of the body, at a higher frequency than any other group in the study sample. In addition, many of these stories indicated the need for control, or a sense of a loss of control, in relation to the weight gain. Phrases such as "couldn't help myself," and "slack off" were prevalent.

Latina participants ($n=19$) were the least likely to write stories of their bodies with weight as a central theme ($f=4$, 21.05%). When Latina participants did write such stories, similar characterizations of the experiences were evident; however, the tenor focused on the negative feelings and not the need for control.

Latina women's stories:

-The 1st time I became aware of my body it was in a *negative* way. I *couldn't stand* the way my hips stuck out and also the way that my breast looked. Overall, I was always self-conscience about my stomach. Never in my life have I had the perfect flat and toned stomache as I always wanted it to be. My thighs were and still are thick. When I was about 13 yrs. old there was a boy whom I really liked a lot. All he ever did was *tease* my about my thighs & he even used to call them "thunder thighs". At that point I was just *humiliated* with my whole body & I was *desperate* to lose weight.

-When I was about 13 yrs. old, I started to gain weight. I noticed it but didn't pay much attention to it. But my *father did* and he worried. I wasn't really conscious about the weight gain and I didn't care. I *started to notice* the fat that surrounded my body. The way that my legs would rub against each other everytime I walked. The way my face had grown a double chin. They way my arms would droop and the way I would stand to hide it all. I was aware that I was fat and that at 5'3 my weight was 145 lbs. I never felt so *miserable*. I *hated* my body, especially when taking a shower.

Specific word usage regarding control was relatively absent in Latina participants' stories; however, as is evident in these excerpts, Latina participants also write of highly negative experiences of weight gain.

Black women ($n=15$) who commented on weight gain ($f=6$, 40.00%), although numerically more than Latinas, were distinctive in that they did not make such explicit statements of self-loathing and willpower. Black participants tended not to overtly characterize their weight gain as either positive or negative, but simply as a fact of which they became aware.

Black women's stories:

-I just started becoming more aware of my body because a lot of my friends started telling me I had gained weight in certain areas. I ended up measuring myself and found out that I had gained an extra 20 lbs. My whole life up until this year I had only weighed 99-100 lbs now I weigh 120 lbs. So mainly I am most aware of my general weight.

-Sometimes last month I was aware of how big I was. People usually say that I was big, and I never used to see that. When I finally went to see a nutritionist, then I started to lose weight, and all of my close became too big, then I knew how big I was.

Black women's stories tended to be neutral in tone, even when their stories did indicate negative experiences. Although Black women did not tend to characterize their weight gain as negative, the experience of the body and weight as negative was not completely absent from Black women's stories. Although they were not as prevalent as in the stories of Latina and White women, when they were written they shared some similar themes. In addition, Black women's stories tended to take a positive turn, or indicate a move towards a neutral experience of their weight gain:

-When I was in the third grade I started gaining weight and a boy in one of my class called me fat. I hated it but I still continued to eat a lot. After some years I got fatter but I lost a lot of it after high school. But as I got older I realized that it wasn't as bad as I thought and that it only made me a stronger person because I had to work for what I wanted to be. Because of this I try to always look at things positively.

The stories which focused on weight gain reproduce previous findings which indicate that Black women are not as concerned with weight as are White women; and that Latinas also tend to view fat negatively (Parker et al, 1995; Poran, 1997). White women's stories were highly emotionally charged and descriptive of negative feelings, and White women's stories mostly centered around issues of weight gain. Black participants' stories which centered on weight as the main theme did not indicate the same type of negative feelings and attributions as either White or Latina participants. Latinas in the sample did write negative stories regarding weight gain, but the central themes most prevalent for Latina participants tended to focus on issues of puberty.

Puberty

Puberty and changes of the body ($f=21$, 39.62%) was another main theme which emerged from the participants' stories. Latinas ($n=19$) were the most likely to focus on this theme ($f=10$, 52.63%). Participants wrote about their bodies changing, either too quickly or not quickly enough, in relation to other girls' bodies. Breast development and menstruation were often mentioned as the physical markers which made them aware of their, and their friends, changing bodies. Not only did participants write about noticing the changes in themselves and in other girls, but they also wrote of how they noticed *other people noticing* them. Menstruation, breast development, the perceptions of their bodies as becoming sexual and sexualized; these changes were often discussed in terms of *confusion, pain, and discomfort*.

Latina participants' stories:

-A time or period of time I can remember being very aware of my body was when I was going through *puberty* maybe. I noticed changes in different parts of my body. I knew they were coming but I kind of noticed that *everyone else kept noticing too*. Like *family members*.

-When a person 1st develops is when they notice the influence their body has in respect to many different things. I think that I was first aware of my body was the 1st time a *man* (older) *looked at me in a sexual way*. This didn't mean anything to me, but my mother has taught me to get thins with my mind and to never use or abuse my body in any way.

-It was when I was 9 years old & was tensed in school because I started to *develop*. Their was this 1 day I remember when we were in gym class and were going to go downstairs and play with the boys in a tournament of volleyball. When we got downstairs I felt so *shy & insecure* about my body because the guys were *looking* at us. But I heard the *making fun* of guys when they saw me. I guess it is because I am *short & chunky*. I felt so *bad* I wished that I got sucked into a hole. That day I felt like the most *ugly* girl in the world & felt that my body was so *disgusting*. *Before that I never really paid any attention to my body. I just never really had to be judge about my body because everyone saw me as a little girl.*

These stories are not only discussing the changes themselves, but indicate a heightened awareness of the responses of others to their bodies. The majority of Latinas' stories (78.95%), regardless of central theme, and more than any other group, included references to other people, other's responses, comments, and so on. The Latina participants' stories are similar to findings from previous work which indicate that many Latinas' experiences of their bodies revolve around issues of sexuality, puberty, and family relationships (Cofer, 1995; Hurtado, 1996).

White women ($f=6$, 31.58%) who wrote stories centered on the puberty theme also expressed similar sentiments regarding the changes of their bodies and how other people's responses to them made them hyper-aware and uncomfortable.

White participants' stories:

-When I was in the *sixth* grade - at a time when your most *vulnerable and pressured* by your peers - the most embarrassing incident, I thought then, had occurred. I was the *first girl* to get a bra in our class, something which was for me very *humiliating* and which I was going to keep *hidden*. While *all the other girls* at that age were still wearing under-shirts, I was blossoming a little *too quick for me to grasp* what was happening to my body. It was a hot spring day when I was *forced* to come to terms that I was *different* and that it was not something I could ever *change* about that. I was wearing a thin uniform blouse and talking to someone, when *two girls noticed* I was wearing a bra and began to talk behind my back & giggle. I wanted to crawl in the corner and die!

-I'm usually aware of my body the only time when I'm *confused* is when I get my period. I got my first period when I was 11 years old. I got so *scared* and I started to cry. I had no idea what was going on with my body. My mother never talk to me about it before. I had so much *pain* and all my body was shaking. Sudnely I told my older sister and she took the time to explain that I was growing and it natural. Since then, I always have *problems* when I get my period and I *panic* I still couldn't get use to it. So, every time I have my period I act wired and I can't get out from the bed.

The similar feelings of embarassment, (a White woman crawls into a corner and dies while a Latina participant gets sucked into a hole), as well as the awareness that the changes were "coming" and being "forced" to come to terms with the changes, are indicative of the major body experiences and feelings young women face during adolescence. The presence of these stories, written by college women, indicates that the emotional effects of adolescence do not dissipate quickly or easily. These recollections of past events indicate that for some participants the events themselves may be over, but the emotional responses are still present.

The Black participants (f=5, 33.33%) who wrote their stories on puberty again distinguished themselves through their tellings. As with their stories which centered on issues of weight, the stories which focused on puberty maintained a calmer intellectual tone. The stories again were marked by words which were not negatively charged. In addition, Black women's stories did not share the embarassment, humiliation, and desperation that was prevalent in Latina and White women's stories.

Black participants' stories:

-I was in the 3rd or 4th grade. And I herd someone mention your period in school. Then my friends told me about it. Because *they* started wearing Training Bra's and some were getting their period. Then I *realized* that I wasn't as Big as some of my friends. Then as time progressed they started to get tender and go. On the day I found out about period I went home and ask my mom & sister about it. I was a *little upset* because they had *already knew* about it but did not tell me.

This story shares some basic elements as Latina and White women's stories, such as comparing with others and experiencing physical change, but the story itself is more a factual explanation and does not describe the feelings of the experience as much. When

discussing the response to her changes and learning about what menstruation is, this participant's main response was towards the fact that others had already known something that she didn't. She was not embarrassed by the changes of her body, or humiliated by her lack of knowledge regarding the subject, but instead states that she was "a little upset" that the information was not shared with her.

Puberty, menstruation, breast development, sexualization, and the many other changes that young women go through physically, are major social markers of womanhood. The attention that is given to them culturally is manifested through these young women's stories; and their personal "natural" experiences of puberty are described as being highly social. The experiences of changes associated with puberty are characterized by these participants in relation to others, observations of others, as well as responses from others. The presence of "other people" in these women's stories was striking, with the majority of participants indicating other people as the main gauge by which to measure and experience the self.

Other People

In the majority of stories ($f=32$, 60.38%), regardless of topic, participants mentioned other people as the trigger for personal physical awareness (Latina=78.95%, Black=53.33%, White=47.37%). Often teasing and pointed comments were discussed, as well as comparing oneself to other girls/women. Although such comparisons and comments were often embedded in the stories but not the central theme, some Latina participants were very aware of the process itself and focused on the comments and comparisons themselves.

Latina participants' comparison-focused stories:

-During high school, I started to notice other girls bodies and I became more aware of my own body. I started to compare myself to other girls and I was always upset because I wasn't developing as fast as other girls. I was a freshman and I was comparing myself to Juniors and Seniors. Not realizing that they were much older than me, and that not everyone develops as fast as others. Everyday, when I would get ready for school, I

would spend hours looking at the mirror to see if anything had grown. As the years went by I began to care about other things (like, tests & papers) and I cared a little less about my body.

-Around 14 I became aware of my body *through other people*. Actually I was *informed* that I had no body (underline hers). It was because I hadn't *developed* yet. *People* at school would *make fun* of me everyday for 2 years. And I *hated* my body back then. Now five years later I no longer feel that way. Things people said did hurt but I realize that I have so many things going for me that that's not really important.

-Well, it all started with a show on television that was about the different type of body. There was type A which I believe was the nicest one which was a body with curves. Type B was similar to type A & type C was the body w/out shape. Well, my sister & I were saying what type we were, *I thought* I belonged in type B *until she pointed out* that I belonged in type C. I stood in front of the mirror *to make the comparison* and came w/ the conclusion that it was true. Since this day I notice my body more & have a different view towards it.

These stories indicate a definite sense of the body in relation to others, and that one's *own* perceptions can change through, or is in relation with, the eyes of others. The emergence of social comparison as so central to these participants' experiences, and so immediate in the study, was unexpected. Participants' awareness and articulation of how comments, relationships, and comparisons influenced their own perceptions of themselves remained a continuous theme throughout the study.

Although there are a variety of experiences and responses to the Story, the cohesion of themes is striking, especially since the participants were only responding to the word "body." There were no priming agents which would lead them towards these types of stories or predispose them to focus on these parts of themselves or experiences; these are the ones that stand out for them. In sum, this portion of the research indicates similar themes among the groups; however, each theme had different levels of intensity and meaning for the participants.

Weight was the most prevalent issue for White women, and the most definitively negative; Latina participants also had negative descriptions of weight when it was central to their story; and Black women in the study rarely offered weight as the central theme,

and were the least likely to describe weight in negative terms. These findings indicate that not only are the issues of weight among Latina, Black and White women different in regards to the centrality of experiences of the body; but, more importantly, that the characterizations of weight-related experiences may hold distinct meanings by ethnic group.

Puberty was the second most prevalent central theme in the stories, and Latina participants were the most likely to discuss issues related to puberty, also in the most negative terms. White women also discussed puberty in negative terms when it was a central theme; and Black women were the least likely to discuss puberty and also less likely to use definitively negative terms. Black women's stories were relatively evenly distributed among themes, and were characterized by their presentation of the information in the stories.

Finally, all groups shared an awareness of how relationships with others influenced their experiences of themselves. Comments and social comparisons were the most prevalently discussed relationships with others. This awareness of the self-in-relation to others, how other people's comments were related to the experience of one's own body, would resurface later in the research discussions.

The similar foci of the stories indicate shared gender-themes which are central to the participants' cognitions of the body; however, the divergence in the language and attributions of the experiences seem to indicate patterns unique by ethnicity/race. These general themes, especially relationships with other people, also continually resurfaced in the discussions which would follow. The participants' descriptions of themselves in the next section of the study also indicate shared and unique themes regarding the experience of the self.

About the Author

Immediately following the written story, on the same page, participants were asked to write 10 words that they believed described them and were important aspects of their

identity. This method was chosen in order to offer the participants space to give self-defined-demographics, rather than the traditional pre-selected categories which researchers often use to make correlations or connections where there may be none. Interestingly, very few participants listed the types of specific roles found in the majority of traditional, pre-designed measures as major self identifications (i.e., age, ethnicity, student status, economic status, etc.); although it is likely that the categorization of ethnicity/race was not included since participants were already in groups on the basis of their identification with the ethnic group categorizations on the sign-up sheet.

Even more interesting is the fact that words describing the body were not very prevalent even though participants had just written a story regarding the body. Rather, participants tended to describe themselves with words that were truly descriptive rather than definitive. Through describing rather than defining themselves, the participants provided meaningful information and a greater "sense" of "who they are." The blank spaces on the page seemed to offer participants truly free space to sketch portraits of themselves; rather than checking off pre-selected categories which feign cohesion while providing only approximations.

The words which the participants offered for this section were first computed for each ethnic group ($N=3$) and frequencies were calculated as unique contributions. All groups contributed to a total of 305 words, with a frequency 493: White women offered the greatest number of words ($\underline{n}=114$) with a frequency of 181; Latinas offered the second greatest amount ($\underline{n}=102$) with a frequency of 190 (only Latinas all filled out all ten spaces); Black women offered the least amount ($\underline{n}=89$) and a frequency of 122. These initial calculations indicated that White women had the most words to describe themselves, and Black women the least. The power of naming may be indicated here in relation to the participants' social status by ethnicity; however, further explorations of the types of words offered, as well as those which are shared and unique, indicated more complex meanings within the numbers.

The words that participants used to describe themselves were first grouped on the basis of word definitions. These groups of words were then examined for the themes they signified when viewed together. Words were then collapsed into categories based on what the types of words signified based on their subject matter and directionality. Through this process emerged 4 categories: 1) inner/character traits (personality traits focused on the self); 2) outward focused traits (personality traits which gain their meaning through others); 3) body descriptions (words which described the body) and 4) cultural/social roles (words that indicated one's role) (See Table 4, Appendix F). There were many words in common among the three groups, as well as words which were distinctive for each group. When shared words between participant groups were accounted for, the total number of words became $N=229$, and were almost evenly distributed between shared ($n=113$) and unique ($n=116$).

Interestingly, the majority of words both shared and unique were in the "inward characteristics" category ($f=141$, 61.57%). In addition, although White women used the greatest number of words to describe themselves, there was less "overlap" and shared terms within the group itself. This seemed to indicate a less cohesive group identity (i.e., the "non-group" of Whiteness); whereas the words that Latina and Black women used to describe themselves, although lesser in number, seemed to indicate a stronger sense of group identification or self-in-relation to one's ethnic group status. Latina and Black women tended to share more words with one another in their own groups. The words that all groups had in common indicated the shared theme of gender status; while the types of words which Latina, Black and White women used which differentiated them seem to indicate their unique positions and experiences as members of their ethnic groups. This may indicate how gender as a social category operates, and is experienced, uniquely in relation to ethnic identification.

Inner/Character Traits

The majority of words ($N=229$) participants offered were descriptions of inner/character traits ($f=141$, 61.57%). Words chosen for this category which were shared ($n=113$) by all three groups ($f=61$, 53.98%) tended to be those words typically associated in U.S. culture with the quirky, differentiated, and independent individual. For example, the most commonly shared words described intelligence ($f=23$), having a sense of humor ($f=23$), and being hardworking and ambitious ($f=18$).

The words which were distinct ($n=116$) to each group seem to distinguish these women's experiences from one another (See Figure 1, Appendix G). When the unique category ($N=116$) was examined for each group's contribution, further distinctions emerged. For example, the words which White women tended to use to describe themselves remained in the general category of the idiosyncratic individual. White women offered words ($n=48$) such as passionate, romantic, a dreamer, easily amused, naive, and idealistic, among others ($f=28$, 58.33%). Latina participants tended to offer words ($n=36$) which described their familial and social status. For example, Latinas provided words and phrases such as money-saver, brought up well, religious/not religious, stressed, and brave, among others ($f=27$, 75.00%). Black women tended to use words which centered on their own personal strengths, while indicative of their awareness of being members of a socially oppressed group. Black women tended to offer highly descriptive "power" words ($n=32$) such as assertive, survivor, adaptability, leader, headstrong, and outspoken, among others ($f=28$, 58.33%). These distinctive words seem to indicate perceptions of the self which are strongly tied to experience as a member of a specific ethnic group; and the challenges one faces due to that membership. Furthermore, it seems that the number of words each group offers is inversely related to ethnic group identification.

Outward Focused Traits

Although the words in the inner/character traits category indicated a strong sense of self, the words that participants used in the outward focused category tended to be

indicative of shared gender-role behaviors. The second most prevalent were words indicating traits important in relation to others ($f=49$, 21.40%), or character traits which gain their meaning through their effects on, or relationships to, other people. The words which were shared in this category ($n=49$) by participants ($f=31$, 63.27%) and unique to groups ($f=18$, 36.75%) all described some relationship to the stereotypical feminine gender role. For example, the most commonly used words for all groups centered around being friendly, nice and kind ($f=36$), being sensitive ($f=23$), honest ($f=17$) and caring ($f=14$) among others.

The few words that were distinctive to each group (Latina $n=36$, $f=7$, 19.44%; Black $n=32$, $f=3$, 12.00%; White $n=48$, $f=8$, 16.67%) also indicated a relationship to the feminine gender role, as well as a few words which described a stance against the role (i.e., being selfish, impatient, greedy, etc). The presence of such words which indicate gender-typed feminine behavior seems to be indicative of the external behaviors that are of the shared gender role of "woman." It is also interesting that there are very few words in this category that are unique to any particular ethnic group, perhaps indicating the few options that are open to women in regard to behaviors associated with others.

Body Descriptions

The third most frequently mentioned words focused on the body ($f=24$, 10.48%). The words in common for this category ($f=14$, 12.39%) were general descriptive words such as pretty, tall/short, slim/chubby, etc. The words which were distinctive for each group were more specific for White women (brown eyes, long hair), yet remained general for Latina and Black participants (flexible, sexy, cute).

Cultural/Social Roles

Finally, cultural/social roles ($f=15$, 6.55%) were offered. The majority of these mentions were generally clustered in only a few individual participants' descriptions. Ethnicity ($n=7$), gender ($n=3$), social roles such as student, major, marital status, and age ($n=7$), and 2 women who identified with the social category of recovering addict.

Interestingly, women who had recently come to the U.S. from Russia were the most likely to mention their social roles as a basis for identification. The White group's unique words for cultural/social roles ($f=6$, 12.50%) was the highest due to this. The presence of these women in the groups would later prove to offer insight into the experience of culture and the body, as well as offer interesting theoretical implications of acquiring the status of "White" people.

In sum, the About the Author section provided more insight into attributions and perceptions of the self than typical demographic information. Although slightly nerve-racking for the trained researcher who is prepared to focus on traditional means of categorization, this section cut into such assumptions and offers information which makes clear the biases of traditional measures. Through this method, what it means to be Latina, Black or White is given meaning by the participants' descriptions of themselves (and extends no further than themselves) rather than essentialist assumptions of defined categories. This section offered far more information than was anticipated, and contextualizes their words further. Its importance is magnified by how it is situated in the research itself: immediately following a story on the body. The quick transition from a story on the body, to descriptive characterizations of personhood, was not expected.

Notecards

When all participants completed the Story/About the Author sections, they were asked to write on notecards what they loved and hated about their bodies. Interestingly, although the majority of words just written in the "About the Author" section indicated a strong sense of self, action, and aspirations, the words written on the cards did not indicate instrumentality. Rather, the majority of women wrote about body parts and descriptions rather than body behaviors. This is consistent with previous work which indicates that women tend to reduce themselves to parts and experience an objectified body consciousness (Cash & Henry, 1995; McKinley & Hyde, 1996).

When examined for shared words, a total of 90 words comprised the notecards: 45 (50.00%) words for the Love category, and 45 (50.00%) words for the Hate category; with a combined frequency of 283. In contrast to the "About the Author" section, Black women offered the most words ($n=115$, 40.64%); White women the second greatest ($n=98$, 34.63%); and Latinas the least ($n=70$, 24.73%). Although participants tended to write about body parts, and Black women wrote the most amount of parts, the reduction of the body to parts did not fall evenly into the love/hate categories. Black women also offered more words for love ($f=67$, 58.26%) than for hate ($f=48$, 41.74%); Latinas and White women had slightly more words for hate than for love: Latina, $n=70$ (Love $f=31$, 44.29%; Hate $f=39$, 55.71%); White, $n=98$ (Love $f=47$, 47.95%; Hate $f=51$, 52.04%), with a much smaller margin between each category.

Black women, although offering the most amount of body parts, were much more likely to offer parts of themselves that they loved (See Table 5, Appendix H). This is very important since it complicates theories on objectified body consciousness which focus on the reduction of the body into parts, but does not attend to the attributions associated with the parts. Indeed, the participants did focus on body parts and that should not be underestimated in regards to women's conceptions of selves, and their attention to the body; however, responses to such an action seem to be mediated, or influenced, by other factors which need to be explored and addressed.

When the words from the notecards were analyzed between groups, and words in common were accounted for, some words were found to be shared among participants, and some unique to each group: Shared ($n=36$, 40.00%); Unique ($n=54$, 60.00%) by ethnic group. The words in common ($n=36$) among the three groups (love $f=19$, 52.78%; hate $f=17$, 47.22%) described the body parts which are typically focused on in women (See Table 6, Appendix I). None of the words in common indicated any form of instrumentality, movement, or action. The words with the greatest frequency in the love category included eyes ($f=19$), hair ($f=14$), legs ($f=13$), and breasts ($f=10$), among others.

The words in the hate category with the greatest frequency included stomach ($f=18$), breasts ($f=12$), and legs ($f=9$), among others. These are the stereotypical "important parts" that women are expected to focus on, and indicate an internalization of the social preferences for these parts.

The majority of words offered for this notecard section were distinctive for each group ($n=54$) (See Table 7, Appendix J). Again, the types of words which distinguish the groups from one another seem to be indicative of distinct relationships to the body by ethnicity. For example, Black women were more likely to write words such as texture, complexion, size, shape/ly, among others, for the love category. For the hate category they offered words such as back layers, hairy, stretchmarks, shoe size, among others. In addition, Black women offered the most words ($n=22$), as well as maintaining the highest frequency for the love category ($n=11$, $f=19$). Latina participants were more likely to offer phrases for the love category, such as goes well together, not too big/small, looks nice in certain clothes; and offered arms, among others, in the hate category. In the unique category Latinas offer the lowest frequency for love words ($n=7$, $f=7$) as well as hate words ($n=5$, $f=6$). White women were more likely to describe themselves for the love category with words such as calves, ears, nothing; and for the hate category used words such as chin, fat, body because no shape, everything, among others. These words, although unique in that the other groups did not include them, are still very similar to the types of words offered in the shared category.

While all responses in the commonly shared category focused on body parts, there were literally a few (3) references to instrumentality or ability in the words distinctive to each group. Interestingly, only the Latina and White participants offered any such words. Only in the love category, one Latina participant wrote "myself," for White women the only words offered were fitness and flexibility. Again, the fact that the participants could make such a major transition - from writing about personal strengths and characteristics in the "About the Author" section to such specific body parts in the "notecard" section -- is

an indication of very complex experiences of the self which becomes even more complicated and evident in the discussions to follow.

In sum, there were many shared themes among the participants which were highly gender-specific. These three sections offer information regarding the common stressors or experiences that women share, but also offer insight into the distinct ways of interpreting, experiencing, and defining these issues. From the above-mentioned information one could gather that White and Latina women are struggling the most with their body cognitions in regard to their negativity; and that Black women are much more personally satisfied and positive. Such findings have previously been measured and have often been interpreted to signify Black women's "immunity" to dominant imagery of women and body standards. In the following discussions, however, a much more complex story emerges.

The Discussion

The cards were collected, shuffled, then handed out to participants who read them aloud. While reading there was a lot of giggling and laughter. Participants were asked what was similar about the cards. It was most often mentioned that they all "sounded the same" and focused on certain parts. This was the springboard for the discussion which was to follow; and most of the ensuing discussions shared very similar themes, as well as flow of subject matter. The major themes engendered by the group reading of the notecards were 1) media, 2) men, 3) women, and 4) comments from others. The discussion which followed the notecard reading tended to be far more intricate, and dealt with many more issues, than was anticipated by the researcher; especially for Latina and Black participants. The expected 15 minutes of conversation lasted approximately 45 minutes for each group.

For the sake of clarity and cohesion of presentation, themes from both the discussion of notecards and responses to images will be presented thematically rather than by "notecards" or "images" discussion. For information regarding the placement and flow of topics covered in discussions, see Figure 2, Appendix K. This figure indicates the order

in which themes emerged for each group, since some groups would refer back to previous points in the discussion. It also indicates the relative complexity and depth into which each group went by listing the general topics covered. The most visible difference among these groups is the complexity and breadth of subjects covered: White women tended to be the least diverse in subjects they offered for the discussions, and tended not to discuss structural issues; while Latina and Black groups tended to be more complex, varied, and offering a larger variety of themes, theories, and perspectives. Table 8 (See Appendix L) is a numerical representation of the topics presented in Figure 2. This provides information on the number of topic shifts for each group discussion; as well as by discussion "section." In addition, although the groups varied in number, from three to eight participants per group, there was not much difference between groups in regards to discussion duration or content.

What is not visible in these tabular and figural representations are the dynamics of the discussions and the different voices within each particular group. The presentation of the focus group results in these representations, as well as in the text to follow, rely primarily on between-group analyses rather than examining differences within-groups. Although the groups are recognized as comprised of unique individuals, each with their own distinct standpoint and perspective, the discussions are examined through the dynamics of each group and how these individuals together offered topics and themes which were then addressed by the group as a whole. Therefore, the processes of each group discussion are included but are not central in the presentation of results.

It should be noted, however, that although within-group dynamics are not as heavily attended to, this should not be misinterpreted to mean that all groups were invariable in themselves; or that all members of each group are considered uniform. The intent of this work is explicitly to avoid essentializing groups and group members, while simultaneously attending to the relations among group membership and personal experience. Unfortunately, the representations of groups are often at risk of erasing

individual difference and feigning homogeneity. Therefore, it is important to make explicit that the chosen methods of analyses, and the results that they yield, may not focus on individual difference, however, this does not translate into the conclusion that none exist.

The results from the discussion portion of the research are presented in relation to one of two themes which emerged from the data; Throughout both "parts" of the discussion, themes centered around 2 major issues: 1) Media and 2) Social Comparisons. The Media section will be presented first in order to discuss participants' experiences of, and perceptions of, images of women.

Media

The first mentions of media as an influence on women's perceptions of themselves followed the reading of the notecards. When asked why they thought that there was such a focus not only on specific body parts, but on parts at all, all but one group responded with some variation on the media, magazines, and social pressures. It was quite evident to these groups that there was a social expectation and pressure to look a specific way, and that the standard could be gathered from dominant-popular media. The following excerpts (See Appendix M for discussion key) indicate the types of responses immediately following the reading of the notecards which focused on the media. Participants all remarked on how similar the cards were, and would repeat some of the body parts mentioned. They were then asked why the cards were filled with words on body parts, rather than, for example, "I love my body because it is strong."

-In the following excerpt from a focus group comprised of Black women, "Kisha" began the discussion:

It's *normal* cuz everybody hate at least one part of their self.
Right.

Like, you know some people, they're so thin, like skin and bones and yet they still that they're fat, you know, like, "What are you complaining about?" cuz you're not (laughs) (umhms, rights)

.....

Yeah, like, it's *normal* cuz everybody does it, you know, but I think it's more like you're *pressured by society*, like, you, alot of // would *learn* to love everything about themselves if these certain *images* they see in the *media*, you know the *T.V. the magazines*, where you have to be a certain size and you can't have certain marks on your body or your face has to be a certain way, even though you know it's a bunch of foundation and a lot of makeup you wouldn't have that *perfect image* and that's why many people hate themselves.

- In one group of Latina participants, "Mariely" began with a focus on social structure:

It's the *structure* of the, of the *society*, how people react to something and we have *grown* like that

I also think it's because we see *women in magazines* and they're always with // *strong stomachs* and things like that, then you want your stomach to be like that or some part of you, they look, they, they look like they have perfect bodies but sometimes they are, just, *computerized* (laughter).

.....

They are *selling* (laughs)

They are *selling* something, they are selling, they they have to, they need to have, they have to *work on our desire* to actually be like that, so they put that picture there so perfect, *so you think "Wow"* or something like that

I wanna look like that

They they say it like, yeah, exercises, um, 10 pounds you will lose, something like that (yehs) work on your stomach, something like that, so, you wtill worry about your body // so

I think we've been *grown up with that mentality* as well it's like, for many centuries, not to mention the structure, especially, of a woman, had to fit a certain

The way it's supposed to be

Right, had to fit a certain characteristic and I mean over the centuries it's changed, right, cuz, back when, women used to be beautiful when they were fat, right, and then it *changed* into the fact that now women have to be like little sticks, and you know fit like this *model of a Barbie* (laughs) which is impossible, but we've been *grown up with that* to a certain extreme *we want to look like that*. You know, we know it's unhealthy, we know that not everyone really looks like that, not everyone can, cuz everyone has different structures, but, *we've been grown up with that, and it's been suck in our heads so many times that it's just there now*.

Almost all groups responded to the notecards with some version of media pressure and standards, and some groups were highly articulate regarding social expectations and the relationship between the individual and cultural norms. The power of media

presentations of women was taken very seriously by the participants, and the reduction of the body into parts was perceived by participants to be directly related to the types of images women are continuously exposed to. Latina and Black participants were the most likely to not only discuss media presentations of women, but to discuss them in relation to structure; how "we've been grown up with that," and cultural pressures influence personal experiences.

The appearance so quickly in the discussion of the articulation of how media influences one's experience of the self indicates that this is a subject participants have indeed thought about and are struggling with; and the intensity of participants' feelings regarding imagery was even more charged when the actual images were laid on the table. Participants often greeted the imagery with statements such as, "What do you wanna make us cry or something?" Other characterizations of their emotional responses were similar, such as "This one gets me mad," or "It's always depressing to look at those pictures." Very intense emotions were directed to models such as "Hate her." Often, these statements were met with laughter by other participants as well as the individual who verbalized the sentiment.

All groups discussed the media as presenting women in very specific ways, and perceived these presentations as having negative consequences for women. The common gender theme revolved around the awareness of dominant-popular media portrayals of women, and that there exists a physical standard in these images. Although all groups acknowledged and were aware of stereotyped images of women in the media, responses to the imagery itself varied between the groups. In most areas of discussion, as is evidenced below, White women tended to accept the standards as they are, while Latina and Black women tended to question and critique those standards. One major component of these standards, perceived and discussed by all groups, is the dominant-popular presentation of thin women.

Weight

The majority of body image research has focused on weight, and the expectation that women must be skinny in order to be beautiful. In most White feminist writings and research, it is considered to be a cultural "given" that all women experience the same kinds of pressures to be thin, and that all women accept the skinny standard of beauty. This notion, of the uniform acceptance by all women in the U.S. of this norm, has been countered by the discussion of "other" standards which exist "sub" culturally (i.e., Black women adhere to a different standard; the standard of the "Black culture."). Although there is evidence that Black women have more positive body cognitions than White women, and this was evident in the stories and notecards which Black participants wrote for this research, the "reasons" for different experiences of the body are more complex and interconnected. Participants in this study discussed weight and social pressures in ways which indicate strong relationships between dominant popular media and personal responses; and these discussions seem to offer insight into the reconciliation and interconnection between dominant imagery and women's responses by ethnicity.

Thinness was the most often discussed characteristic of media beauty, and the thin=good portrayal of women was acknowledged by all groups; however, the preference for thinness was not met with the same response by all groups. White women tended to accept the thin standard as "obvious," and did not question the portrayal of women as skinny. Latina and Black women tended to question the standard itself and critique it. Latina and Black women tended to focus on critiquing the idea that thin=good, while White women focused on explaining why fat=bad.

-In a focus group comprised of White women, "Jenna" brought up the issue of women not "taking care" of themselves as "evident" by being what is considered to be overweight:

...when you see a woman like that, you're thinking they're not really *taking care* of themselves or something, like getting *that big*...like they're not watching their weight

They're not watching what they're eating
Or they're not exercising or

.....

(laughs) I told you like I was watching they had some lingerie thing on the T.V. and it was for big women and I was like, "Oh my god *what are they showing?! They look horrible,*" cuz I don't know they just...*that's too much. That's too much weight.*

This excerpt is illustrative of many conversations held by White participants in all three groups. White women in this sample did not question their own preferences for thinness, and tended to give examples which "proved" that fat was indeed ugly. One conversation of White women continually referred to large women wearing "short shirts" and how "ridiculous" they looked. There was an acceptance of fat being ugly among these women, which was not prevalent in the Latina and Black women's discussions.

- "Karin," a participant in a focus group comprised of Latinas, questioned the standard by posing her own question to the group:

Somebody mentioned something about the way we should be, like, that, we get like um pressure from like men, from the media to be a certain way, like, *what certain way is that?* Like specifically

The perfect body?

Like, what

I don't even think that models have the perfect body

Like, what's the idea of the perfect body, like, what do you think the media

I think, like, um, it's trying to uh

The media

Thin is good

Thin is good

Yeah

Thin you think?

Well, yeah, yeah

Like, everything?

Thin everywhere except for your breasts, big breasts, but thin

This excerpt indicates the premise being questioned and actively discussed, rather than being completely accepted. Latina and Black participants tended to have similar conversations regarding the thin premise. In addition, the conception of the individual as learning from culture was a major component of their discussions. Thinness in itself was

not perceived as inherently beautiful, but was understood as a culturally-defined preference. The following discussion by a group of Black women goes even further, questioning even how one learns to see thin as beautiful:

It doesn't look right. It doesn't look good.

But, *why*, made us think that? That's the thing, *who made us think that fat wasn't attractive* you know? I mean, *who said it wasn't attractive?* I mean, if you look at the gods in Greek mythology they weren't the skinniest thing in the world now. They were kind of chunky. And that was considered beautiful. So why are we *///now///*

Society changed, society has changed

.....

And I'm just like, yeah, *they're telling us* to be a size one is when like the average people are like a size 12, *something's wrong, and why does small necessarily mean better?* You know. It's like people, they wanna have smaller feet they wanna have smaller hands, they wanna have

Well, certain parts don't want 'em too small (laughter)

Right you know. But they tend, they generally wanna have smaller everything. *Why is smaller necessarily better*, I don't know.

These discussions indicate not only that all participants are aware of the thin standard, but all groups did discuss feeling pressured or concerned with these standards. Contrary to theories which present Black women as immune to social preferences for thinness, the participants do present the thin ideal as a pressure they feel they are expected to adhere to. This pressure, however, is responded to differently, through questioning. This is not a preference which exists in a vacuum, and the majority of participants felt the expectation personally; however, not all groups internalized the preference as their own. White women tended to acknowledge the standard, accept the standard, and try to fit the standard. Latina and Black women tended to acknowledge the standard, and described feeling pressured by it, but actively critiqued and questioned it; this, however, does not necessarily mean that they are immune to it or unaffected by it. Their discussions indicated strong social critiques of something that they were feeling personally.

Models (No Body's Perfect)

One critique of the imagery which was shared by all groups was the critique of the model. All groups were aware of the construction of media imagery, the creation of images, and the presence of new technologies which even further remove these snapshots from reality. The awareness of computerized alterations, hours of make-up applications, and plastic surgery, was commented on by all groups, and this usually led to a discussion of the "nobody's perfect" theory.

Participants offered anecdotes of personal model-sightings, interviews seen on T.V. and read in magazines, and offered these as "proof" that no one is indeed perfect. This awareness was often offered with a sense of relief, but was coupled with a sense that this knowledge did not make it easier to deal with the images. Even though they knew these were not "real," participants verbalized a stronger pressure to try and emulate the image, to "do it anyway."

-Latina participants' focus group:

They're too skinny, to me, that's my opinion, um, they have no shape
I wouldn't mind having a body like Tyra though

Yeah

She has, she looks like *she has the perfect body*, to me

It's all *computerized*

(mumbles)

That's what in media studies, media studies, and we studied images, and *it's all computerized*

I mean, *how could they even have that profession if no one even has the perfect body, I mean, why, why do they have to do that*

I mean she looks like she

I don't think Tyra is perfection

I don't think there's such a thing as the, being perfect, having the perfect body.

It's just a certain look that you might have (yeahs) in your eyes or, you know, anything else, and they'll just work with that. I think, that's why I

Yeah but if you have nice looking eyes and you're fat, they won't put you in a magazine (yeahs) so it does have a lot to do with your body

.....

I saw Linda Evangelista today, I was actually walking // and she came up. She's a fresh, she was, I mean she was slim, but, she's pretty, but for the first time I saw a // model

that wasn't like skinny-skinny, I mean she's slim but, she didn't look anorexic or like Kate Moss (laughter)

It's like if you see them, I seen her also, she just looks horrible the way she was dressed, and the way she was just, she just looked like a slob, so basically what is that supposed to, you know, here she is, *trained as being beautiful and having a perfect body and everything*, but, I mean, *it's all an image (umhms) cuz outside of the camera she looks nothing like that*, you know

The awareness of there being no such thing as perfect, that outside of the camera there is no such thing, was often discussed very passionately. In this excerpt, one woman even asks why they have a profession for someone that does not truly exist. The knowledge of the created image was often repeated and heated in discussions, as if it was important to continually remind oneself of this fact. The following excerpt also indicates a very common perception among participants: that often there is a gap between intellectual and factual knowledge, and emotional and psychological responses.

-Black participants' focus group:

But I mean, it's like the imagery is like *perfect* and there's nothing that
There's no such
thing as perfect but

There's no such thing as perfect
We try to get as close to that as possible
It's all //

Cuz I was reading an interview with Tyra Banks and she was like, "I have stretchmarks," and I was like, "Where?"

They cover it up with makeup!

Tyra Banks, a very light-skinned African-American model, was mentioned in almost every group (6 of the groups: 2L, 2B, and 2W) and always in the "nobody's perfect" conversation. Her many interviews and sightings were not only proof that she was not perfect, but her admission of her flaws was often seen as an endearing characteristic. Tyra (most are on a first name basis with her) was in a class by herself, as were her breasts (most groups engaged in the "are they real" debate, but came to no definitive conclusions). Whether they are real or not, however, does not really seem to be the question. Participants were often remarking on how they "knew" something, but their

feelings betrayed their knowledge. In other words, their knowledge that "perfection" is created did not curb their own desire for that perfection; the picture of perfection was of stronger influence than their knowledge of it's creation. Even if Tyra is not truly perfect, the presentation of her, and perception of her, is perfection. It is this perfection, real or not, that participants responded to and felt pressured by. In addition, the first-name-basis-supermodels seem to have a celebrity status that separates them from the "rest" of the models, and the rest of the issues that the groups would discuss. For example, when groups turned to issues of the sexualization of women, they did not point to any of the known popular models.

Sex Sells

The sexualized imagery of women was another area which received a lot of attention, with Latina and Black participants the most likely to discuss these issues. Latina participants tended to focus on the idea that "sex sells," and that women are being presented as sexual objects for the purpose of selling products. Black women tended to focus on the sexual references in the imagery and compared it to pornographic representations of women. Latinas' discussions on sexual imagery were not as direct as Black women's; while White women only alluded to sex in the images.

-In one group of Latina participants, "Lina" focused on the similarities between mainstream media imagery and pornographic representations of women:

...I notice the the magazines the pictures are getting more, they're showing more skin, you know, and when I even buy a magazine like they have a picture of a woman who's like completely almost naked and I feel embarrassed to carry that magazine o, you know cuze, I rea, I don't wan, I don't want her to, for other people to see I don't know it's like uh I feel like I'm carrying something else you know, I feel like ripping the cover off (laughing) and I just do...Like, I was turning the picture once and I see like a naked woman showing me her her butt, and like, I was standing there like, and I feel like why why is it necessary for them to show me her part to just advertise a cream? (laughter)

In this excerpt there is an interplay of many elements which are centralized on sexual representations of women. Lina not only discusses the "skin" being shown, but that

she feels embarrassed for others to see this, or to see her carrying it. Her allusion to pornography then moves into its purpose of advertising. One group of Black participants also began discussing pornography in the midst of discussing the imagery. When asked why they were making the connection between the magazines and the imagery the following discussion ensued:

Cuz they're basically the same

Like this, *why is she half-naked?* What is she advertising, cream? This is another thing, why do you have to have your legs so thin to look cute? (mhmm) There's another one

This one this one

This one she's just bony, yeah don't like that one

Do you notice *how they put lights right here?* Right here, they put like a *special light over here* so that when you look at it you're *not just looking at the whole* you go *directly to the crotch* (laughter, uhhus) you see sex

It's where the sex is

Yes yes yes yes

Ok, if you look at these um, look at some of the *facial expressions*

Exactly

on these, and on some of them, any of them, almost any woman right,

like they're vulnerable

and then you look at the one's in *playboy or penthouse*, they're basically the *same thing*

umhmm

cuz the facial expression is the same

Like they want, look at that, what is wrong with her? (laughter)

She could be in playboy, the only thing she would have to do it take off her clothes and that would be *the same sexual position* that they have in playboy

heah

They're vulnerable

Yeah yeah

Here are my legs wide open, you know.

The connection to pornography, the selling of "woman's sex," and these images indicated a heightened awareness of the relationship between regularly seen images of women and women being portrayed as sex objects. One participant in the above excerpt astutely observed that one particular image was constructed so that one did not look at the "whole," but on a specific part. The ability to detect and describe objectification indicated a level of analysis which was present only in discussions by Latina and Black participants.

Latina participants were also the most verbal regarding the purpose of ads and sexual representations of women in a consumerist culture. Throughout the discussions, the issues of participating in the consumption of goods based on ads was presented as a dilemma. In one group a participant stated, "but it's probably our fault cuz that's the way they sell. So it's really our fault, cuz we buy it." When asked what options there were one young woman answered/asked, "Not buy it?" In contrast, White women rarely discussed issues of selling and buying. In one group, a discussion began to move in the direction of social critique, then quickly veered back to clothing sizes:

-In this particular group, comprised of White women, "Amanda" was a lone voice which attempted to introduce a social critique into the discussion:

There's not enough *unity*, you know, but then it because it's like, I mean, because you would think like, the people who, let's say this, the people who have almost semi-perfect body, they'll say that. The person who's fat will be like well you can say that you can say fuck this because you're almost there, you know, you know, you, even if these, you're lying anyway, you're lying to make me feel better...you know, blah blah blah, so I think that there's a lot of, because we're all different shapes and because everyone has a different idea of how you know their body looks, *there's not enough unity...*

.....
It's just like, *get together and do what? Like stop buying popular magazines, or what woul, what would the things, like unity for what? Like, oh we're never gonna diet again? That's like having, you know, I mean, I think, I just, I don't understand what could be done, you know what*

Well, get, just get sizes for people who, you know

Social critique quickly moves to clothing sizes when "Unity for what?" was stated by Jenna with the cynicism of the "get real" perspective. Jenna also later stated, "I think that it's very politically correct and pro-feminist, like, 'oh it's just your attitude and your self confidence that gives us,' you know, gives you the good look or whatever and that's (laughs) that's not necessarily true, I mean, it would be nice, but...." Here is also visible the "forced" consensus of the group, since "unity for what?" immediately silenced Amanda, who was desirous of holding such a discussion.

White participants tended to remain within the confines of the body and individual psychology; while Latina and Black participants engaged in some very exciting discussions regarding the relationship between images of women and exploitation, discrimination, stereotyping and race/ethnic essentialism. Latina and Black women were the most likely to discuss issues regarding how images manifested cultural ideas and ideals which went beyond the body; and how these ideals were based on inequality and misrepresentation of their ethnic groups.

Exploitation and Discrimination

Latina (2 groups) and Black (2 groups) participants were the most likely to focus on issues of exploitation and discrimination in regards to women's bodies and physical attractiveness; and relate these issues to structural inequalities (no White groups held such discussions). Latina participants in one group made overt connections between the imagery and advertising through the use of women's bodies. The idea of "sex sells" then moved to another level in which sex not only sold, but was being used to sell. In other words, the issue went deeper than the image on the page.

-Latina participants' focus group:

Like they're saying you know you get the car you get the girl kinda thing //
 Yeah, why, I don't know, is it like, I don't know, for guys, gonna buy it and stuff
 It gets me like, yeah, it does, it makes me *uncomfortable*, you know
 Yes, cuz they're, *they're exploiting women, they're using their bodies just to get what they want. Cuz it's not their bodies they don't care.*

This excerpt indicates the first connection, women being used to sell, being conceptualized in relation to exploitation. In a capitalist culture, being paid to pose naked on a car is not necessarily perceived as exploitation; and these participants' ability to relate these types of images to the status of women (for use by those who don't care) was impressive. Connections were also made in another group between issues of the body and gender inequality. A few groups discussed how these are women's issues, and are based in

the inequalities between women and men. Serious consequences of exploitation through selling the body were discussed; such as discrimination.

-Latina participants' focus group:

...it's like men they can have their little pot belly stickin out to there...but I bet no one says anything to them, and it's always to the women that it's, *they're looking for something to put us down, so that we don't get up to that st, you know level, where the men are at*, so it's still that *competition with the men versus women in the world to // in society*.

[R]: So, you're saying it's more than just about your body]

yeah umhms

I think so

umhms

(nodding)

Yeah I I agree wi her because *there's a lot of men who don't think women are as smart as men* (umhms) or can *achieve*, like, um, certain like *statuses and jobs* and stuff like that. Like can *go as high as them*.

This discussion then moved into a story in which a friend was discriminated against on the basis of her weight, and connected to the issues of inequality. Therefore, these participants were able to make the connections of the body being based in inequality; that it was being used as a weapon to keep "us down." Women's bodies are then being used as weapons against the women within them; since your own body could mean the difference between being hired or fired. This was recognized as not a personal fault of one's body, but as a result of the inequalities between women and men. Discrimination in the workplace was also discussed by another group of Black participants in which "Aisha" stated:

But sometimes sometimes the *appearance has a lot to do with getting jobs* anyway, you know when you if you go get a job I'm sure if I go get a job with someone that looks you know, is taller than I am and you know have this beautiful, and if they have the same you know background or, she'll get the job, you know, *of course, there's no doubt about that*, so I think it has a lot to do with it anyway.

These discussions of discrimination and structure were only present among the Latina and Black groups. White women had very little critique of imagery and effects of

imagery in regards to gender analyses and none in regards to ethnicity/race. Latina and Black women were more likely to discuss issues of essentialism and misrepresentation, the pros and cons of "inclusion," as well as an analysis of the visual representations of women by ethnicity.

Essentialism and Misrepresentation

All three Black focus groups, and 2 of the Latina groups, discussed the inclusion of Women of Color in fashion, modeling, and dominant-popular imagery. The portrayals of ethnicity were critiqued, especially in regards to how imagery will influence outsider's perceptions of a specific ethnic group. Many connections were made to stereotyping (for example, one Black group discussed the stereotypes of "Jamaican hair") and there was expressed concern that inclusion often meant being portrayed in a too-specific way; therefore, the inclusion of Women of Color was considered both a triumph and a possible threat.

Issues of essentialism usually emerged when focusing on particular images of women. For example, Black participants tended to discuss a model who is very dark-skinned and has become quite popular in the fashion magazines. There was much critique regarding the "use" of this woman, how she is being presented, and what types of colors "they" put her in. In other words, this particular model was not only being responded to in regards to her being a dark-skinned woman of African descent; but as someone whom they are well aware is being used to sell to women of African descent. Knowing that this woman's image is being created, her portrayal was examined thoroughly. For example, one woman stated:

But they put these things in her skin to make her look darker so she could glow and I don't like that, like I think they try and disfigure her somehow, I don't know, I don't appreciate what they're doing to her body... Yeah, they try to make her look glow in the dark, no, they always put white on her so she could look like super dark, and she's really not that dark...she isn't.

Another group of Black women focused on the same model, also discussing how "they're putting her in white...for the contrast." Black participants were more likely to discuss complexion, skin tone, and how the images have been altered to make skin look unreal. Black women also tended to be the most observant in regard to actual images, analyzing them specifically, and commenting on how the images have been orchestrated. "Felicia" critiqued the the compositions of images in relation to their presentation of skin colors and tones:

Know what I notice too, how the *environment reflects the complexion*, like she has on red and *look her skin*, and, she has on yellow and *look at her skin*
 yup
You know a Black woman this color? I mean, this pale, you know (umhms) you can tell that's computerized or whatever, but that's not, I don't think that's her complexion
 Yeah, she's
 yellow, I mean, this is, I mean *literally* right (laughter) *she's really yellow*

This focus on the intentional representation of women, that women are being presented and portrayed in very specific ways through lighting and computer techniques, was tied to the awareness that specific skin tones (especially very dark) are a relatively new phenomenon in the fashion industry. In addition, attention to the "literally" yellow woman also indicates the attention given to meanings of skin shade and tone. Felicia's own qualified response, perhaps because there were a variety of women in the room with varying skin colors and tones, further illustrates the significance of this discussion.

Although highly critical of the images themselves, the inclusion of Black women as top models was discussed theoretically as both positive and negative. Participants in two groups of Black women held conversations regarding how images of ethnicity could influence social perceptions of an ethnic group. Inclusion itself is questioned as the signifier of equality, and the participants were very articulate regarding the politics of the body and ethnic essentialism:

I think it's *positive*, like, *not everybody's looks the same*, you know, in different cultures and in any one particular culture there's like a *diverse looks of people*, you know

like say for *African Americans we have different shades you know and different features cuz we're a mixed variety* so why not have everybody, you know, different people, cuz that's, *represents the world*, it's just different, we're not all looking the same and we can't get to that way even with plastic surgery or whatever you do you just gonna look a certain way, that's the way you was made, so we need to accept that.

I think it's *positive to a certain point*, I mean, for example, the new look in is the natural look, you know, and that's that's good because a lot of people are going you know going back to naturals instead of perming their hair, but then *at the same time there's still this skinny* you know *thin like model*, and *that's not a typical Black African American woman*, I just, I don't think it's now completely portrayed as, you know, images are supposed to be put out so we can *identify* with it so we could buy the product, but's not really, you know, *that's not really what's happening*, I mean, it's still a, it's *still stereotypical* to a certain point (yeahs), but, *we've come, you know, they they've come a long, they've come a little but they still got a long way to go, you know, but it's a start.*

It's it's like she said, it's *positive in a negative kind of way*. Because most people feel that they do have to fit into a certain category, you know, so it's now, there's a more, there's a more, there's a lot of versatile categories for women to fit into. There's not just, you know, the ugly or pretty, there's more, there are in between and there are different types of ugly and pretty now, so it's like, what people would consider ugly and pretty, so there's more for people to get into but that's *still not a good thing...it still putting people in categories, it's still stereotyping people.*

This particular discussion indicates extremely astute analyses of the conflict of inclusion. The discussion itself illustrated a progression of awareness from 1) positive, to 2) positive to a certain point, to 3) positive in a negative way. The focus on categorizing and stereotyping is similar to critiques (duCille, 1996) which have proposed that to be included is often to be coopted; and the system in which Women of Color are being included is not one which can be called feminist, or geared to a more just social order. As one participant openly shared her thought process, beginning with "we've come" to "they've come" a long, and then, a little way. As she states, however, it is indeed a start. There was not much to indicate, however, if it was or wasn't a start in the right direction.

Many participants discussed stereotypes, and were aware that being represented in the modeling industry means to be misrepresented as well; and to create new stereotypes. Latina participants also discussed issues of essentialism, misrepresentation, and the racism in images of Latinas. When looking at the board exclusively comprised of Latinas, one group explained:

That's not how we're shaped.

Yeah, we've got more curves (laughter).

I mean, it should bother us, cuz other people look at, they see a Latina magazine and they automatically think that we're supposed to look like that, you know, and, it just represents, makes us represent something that we're not, not everybody is, and that's wrong.

This brief moment in the discussion holds an incredible amount of information. It begins with a distinction between the self and the image; and this self is assumed to be representative of the group. "We" in this moment meant Latinas, indicating a stronger relationship between the personal responses to the imagery and ethnic identification. In addition, the statement that it should "bother us," because others will learn to perceive Latinas in a specific way, is also indicative of another awareness: that not only do women learn how to view themselves through these images, but others learn how to view women. Not only is this not representative of Latinas, but the images "makes us represent" something which is not; and, plain and simple, "that's wrong."

Another group of Latina women expressed similar ideas of misrepresentation, that not all Latinas look a specific way. In addition, there is the observation that magazines and media which have been specifically published for "them" have begun to move away from the "real" Latina. The publications themselves, and therefore Latinas themselves, have then been co-opted by larger popular media standards:

These aren't too pretty, I mean, since we're all Hispanic, here like Salma Hayek and um Idalys, they're two pretty girls, I mean I don't know, the way, I don't know, I guess the way they're portrayed really in in like magazines and stuff is like kinda like they are these perfect women, you know?

Because of Salma Hayek and, what was the other one? They are, they are, you know, very thin women, and they're portraying Latinas as being very thin but in in uh, as being a Latina, you have all all types of women, you have very large women, very small, petite women, very tall women, so they're just showing that certain part of Latina women, which is good because at least the Latina woman has a change to get seen out there, but unfortunately they're getting seen as a skinny girl, you know, not the real Latina...I mean, I, they are real, but in the sense that a real person has, she has she has a little bit of stomach here, I mean I've seen Salma Hayek in themovie um, she was in a movie and she was, I saw her sto, she was like, her body was like nice, I was like wow, you know, I was like WOW (laughter) I mean her stomach was nice and flat and I was like that's what I want (laughter) but, you know it's just, unfortunately...I was like, and I'm talkin like, "Did

you see her booddddyyy?!" You know, I was like, because it's like you don't see much of that. And that, *it's sad, because I wish that more Latinas would be seen as though, they're true selves, you know, the very thick, um, oh the perfect example, the magazine Latina that came out now, before when they were just publishing they had models, very um dark skinned, very like chunky, as in a sense like with big hips and stuff like that,* (umhms)

but now

But now, very few like, when the fashion, it's in the fashion, the fashion pages, *they're thin* (yeahs) they're like, um, toothpicks, and it's like, wait a minute but *how is a Latina woman supposed to fit into this?* (yeahs).

One woman in this group later discussed how she has stopped buying any magazines since, "I don't see anybody that looks like me so I don't buy them." The perception of essentialist representations of Latinas not only engendered a sense of being misrepresented and so misunderstood or unknown; but also as related to racist stereotypes regarding physical appearance and skin tone or shade. As this particular conversation continued, participants began to discuss racism in perceptions of Latinas and how not all Latinas look the same:

I'm from Peru and I have a friend of mine that's also from Peru, and *we look totally different, I'm, I'm much lighter than she is, she's very dark, you know, and when we went to this, it was a this theater that we went to together, and the guy was asking us, "Where are you from?" and we both said, we were sitting next to each other "Peru-Peru" and he's like "wow" he's like, "look at this and they look so different." You know. And I'm like, yeah, but that's in every country, you know, and I don't think it's just in the Latin countries, it's in it's in every nationality you're from, there's not just one look that comes with every individual, and individual is an individual* (yeahs).

I get a lot of that, cuz I'm Peruvian too, and when they ask me and they're like "Oh, you girls don't look like Peruvians" (laughter).

Yeah that's what they told me exactly.

Ok, what is that supposed to mean you know?

Yeah, then they tell me oh well you know *all i know they're short and dark*
(chorus) *darks skinned*

.....

You know? And it's true, *like all they're they're light skinned, right?* (yeses).

These connections of images, women's status, misrepresentation and racist stereotyping are all indicative of a very strong awareness of the person as social. The understanding that people learn how to view, and treat, themselves and others was central to these critiques. This conversation, beginning with misrepresentation in images moved

to this discussion of racist essentialism; and then moved towards the participants' worries of future generations. This group articulated their connections and theories with the very possible outcome: if one learns from culture, and culture is beginning to use us to portray a specific look, how will "we" (the Latinas of our future) learn to be?:

I think it is, and unfort, It is uh *damaging* uh not our generation, well, yeah, *partially our generation, but the next generations after us, they're gonna be thinking "Well, I gotta be this thin and I gotta be have a really skinny nose and I have to" and it shouldn't be like that. Cuz they see all this, this is all commercial, it's in T.V., it's in um magazines everywhere, so, this is what they're, um, seeing and this is how they're gonna wanna be, and, unless it's, something's done now, it's gonna keep on and it probably it'll it'll keep on and keep on because that's what many women are buying into and many women are you know, cuz, for instance, like c'mon who's really gonna fit into a thing that's this small? (laughter).*

5 women

She's skinny, she's skinny and I looked at her and I'm like

you can see her ribs

You can see her ribs, and I'm like wow, that's a nice bathing suit but (lots of laughter) you know. And like for instance the next generation, *regardless of what culture they are, they're gonna see this and they're gonna be like you know, I wans that bathing suit and I want that kinda body, and it's gonna effect it, and //*

Not only does this discussion proceed to talk about future generations, but the statement "regardless of what culture they are" seems to tap into the awareness of assimilation; and that inclusion in the modeling industry is not compatible with maintaining many cultural traditions or the appreciation of one's heritage. Perhaps "regardless of culture" demands a disregarding of culture. The influence of culture on one's perception of self was central to Latinas' discussions. Their discussions point to their own experiences as contributing to this awareness.

One very interesting statement which also attests to the power of cultural experience and the experience of the self, as well as a peephole into the construction of Whiteness, comes from a Russian woman who had recently come to live in the U.S., and so recently also aquired the label of "White." There were quite a few young Russian women in the group, and their presence in the study serves to further explicate and

complicate notions of Whiteness and culture. This particular excerpt indicates one participant's own awareness of cultural influence and how she has learned to see, and feel, herself differently. "Marina's" discussion is unique and important since she overtly discusses her own awareness of culture and environment:

I think it's important where you live also, like before, *back in my country I would never complain about my weight, cuz I would look around and everybody was in the same and, I was normal. Since I came here, then I start to go "I gotta lose weight" and stuff like that. It's being in my mind that I have to lose weight, and when I was back in my country I didn't care about that cuz everybody would be like the same weight and I mean, I would be normal. No one would tell you, lose weight... "You look perfect, oh how do you you look so graceful" I would feel good about myself also at the same time when I would see people around me in the same way.* Here it's like a big thing, here especially in the United States, everybody to lose weight. It's a big big thing, so it's actually the society. That's what I think. In general, it's not only to look good for a man or whatever, you gotta know, I mean US, woman to woman // how we look at ourselves, "Oh she's big or oh she looks good" Ok, I'd be like, stuff like that, I don't know. So it's actually *where you live, and who you hang around with.* That's an important, very important issue.

Marina not only discussed the different cultural preferences, but also the different treatments and responses by those living within culture. Her critique presented the relationships one has with those around one, and their preferences and comments. In addition, she also discusses "looking around" and seeing people who look "the same," like her; therefore, she is normal. She has always been normal, until she came here. Her description of her new status as a non-normal person, as newly experiencing herself although her physical being is not new, offers insight into the relationships one cannot always see when situated snugly in hegemonic ways of knowing. She is a White woman who, unlike most White individuals, is conscious of her Whiteness; and is responding to the dominant culture's rules and regulations for White women. Her characterization of the U.S. preferences for thinness goes beyond an anthropological interest of a viewer, and delves deeply into her new reality as not one of the beautiful people. She is keenly aware that she is not beautiful only because she no longer lives in Russia.

These discussions on exploitation, misrepresentation, and essentialism, indicate a keen awareness of culture, structure, and how one learns to feel from one's social environment. Latina and Black women's conversations go beyond the body to the meta-meanings and consequences of inclusion in a biased system. The worry of misrepresentation and assimilation, essentialism and racism, and the loss of one's heritage is very real and well-founded. The articulate discussions of these subjects illuminates theory and illustrates the urgency with which these issues must be addressed.

Alternative Imagery

Finally, responses to the alternative imagery presented to participants indicated a real excitement to see real women. These images were characterized often with deep appreciation for the action and power perceived in them. Participants noted that the imagery was "different" than the typical images of women, and described them as "In your face. This is what you can do with your body you know." One group, when asked if they would like to see more of such images, all answered in chorus, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

The responses to the alternative images focused on a few major areas: 1) that the images themselves engender different emotional responses, with participants stating that the feeling was that of positive strength and action; 2) the images seemed more "approachable," and the participants tended to characterize the women themselves as more instrumental and personable; and 3) these images allowed for true identification with the individuals since they were perceived as being "real."

All groups shared the above-mentioned responses to the images, with the most common statements focusing on the images showing "real" women who one could approach and "talk to." This shared gender-theme indicates the rift that social images of women has created among women themselves.

-White participants' focus group:

They're like everyday people they're

different

See on the street
 On the street
 Yeah

.....

Yeah they look like *real people*, like you could *meet them anywhere like talk to them* and like these women I wouldn't, I would be like shy to talk, yeah, like intimidated (yeahs, umhms) I'd be like you know, what do they think of me. I'd be like talking to her and she's like probably all "oh this one's so fat and I'm like so pretty," and these people like you could

They're real

Yeah, you could like talk to them about anything.

And and and another thing is like you're not, I'm not, like, okay, like number 11, 13 and 4 for instance, *I'm not looking at them in a way like oh they're beautiful, they're skinny*, I'm looking at them, like, *these are cool women* (yeahs, umhms) you know they're strong, and athletic and *I'm not even thinking about the beauty part of if they're skinny or anything.*

Many participants discussed this different sense of the women in the imagery, and how the images themselves engendered a different feeling and perspective. Participants discussed their own attention to the women's athletic abilities and strength, that they wished they could "do that," and that the images presented women not "using their body...for pictures or competition," but instead for action. There was also some discussion of the desire to see such imagery, with the hope that these types of images would become a new norm:

-Latina participants' focus group:

...They probably wouldn't sell, but

As much as much

as much, but if we, if we started getting *accustomed to seeing, our eyes are so accustomed to seeing this* that if we look at that we're like, you know it's not appealing to us, *with time*, and if the young kids, you know, *the younger generation start growing up with that, it'd grow acceptable, and it'd be acceptable to be, who you are.* Accept your self worth, you know, the individual you are. Because this has taken *many generations* just to be you know

The awareness that familiarity can bring about acceptance, and that the present preferences for thin bodies can be changed through more positive and realistic representations of women, demonstrates not only a welcoming of these images but a real understanding of the processes which make stereotypical images so powerful. Another

welcome aspect of these images, mostly for Latina and Black participants, was the sense of identification with many images and lived experience. Black participants in one group, when focusing on an ample-buttocked woman, stated:

This is pretty average looking, these people, cuz I'm sure we can at least *identify one person in your family* (yeahs, laughter)
I see it around my block all the time (laughs, yeahs) *I do*

These statements are in contrast to the feeling this group described when looking at stereotypical images of women:

It's funny because um they're giving us these *pictures for us to identify with* and buy the product but really it's, *that's not really what's happening*. We're trying to *live up to what they put out there* (yeahs) you know, so it's kinda like *you're being tricked* (laughs) *subliminal messages*.

All groups responded to the alternative images very positively, and focused on them being real, strong, indicating variation, being normal, and displaying something honest and identifiable. There was strong support for these images, a desire to see more of them, and the belief that it is possible to become accustomed to them and create new ideas of beauty. These images elicited extremely positive responses which were focused on emotional and interpersonal responses: these were approachable women with whom one could talk and be comfortable. In contrast, the women portrayed in the stereotypical fashion were perceived as intimidating and unapproachable.

As the following section will illustrate, Social Comparison and a sense of being judged by others, and in competition with other women, is prevalent in the women's characterizations of how the body standards are effecting their own self-esteem and relationships with other people. Although there are many wonderfully articulate social analyses in the above section, the following section indicates the complexity and struggle which these participants experience personally; and provides insight into the difficulty of maintaining a social consciousness in the face of personal conflict. Participants continue to share gendered-themes in the following section, and are far more cohesive in these

personal responses than was discussed above. It seems that the experiences women have with others, and especially with other women, all share the common thread which divides them.

Social Comparison

The social comparison with others as a major component of perceptions of the self emerged in the first section of the study, as participants often included Others in their stories and as the trigger for negative feelings toward the body. This theme re-emerged in the discussions and cohered into its own many-faceted main response. Participants' discussions quickly focused on men, other women, and family members as sources of stress, judgement, and social comparison. The sense of being judged by others was very strong, and there was also an awareness that other people can and will make it clear when one is perceived to be physically unacceptable. The women in these groups spoke as if they felt they were always "fair game," and that the consequences of judging women on their appearance focused women's attention not only on their own bodies, but on one another.

Participants offered a variety of specific social relationships through which they learned to view themselves. The majority of participants offered men/guys as the main "Other" from whom they received negative feedback or feelings. In addition, participants described complex relationships with other women due to social pressures. Other women included strangers and friends, and included upward and downward comparisons. Finally, some groups also discussed the pressures felt from family members; this was most prevalent among Latina participants.

The majority of components in the discussions for this section were shared among the women. While in the previous section (Media) there were topics covered, for example, in the Latina and Black groups which the White women did not discuss (i.e., Misrepresentation and Essentialism); in this section on Social Comparisons, all groups covered similar ground. The topics discussed in relation to social comparisons shared

more themes and topics, and there were less areas of divergence between groups. In addition, the only area in which ethnicity became a main point of discussion was the area of men judging women. It is here that "the standard" becomes even more complex, since there is indeed more than one.

Men

Participants in all nine groups offered in their discussions the awareness, or sense, that men expect women to look "perfect." Participants perceived that men focus first and foremost on a woman's body, that it was a "given" that they are valued for their bodies, and so it became very important to "keep up" their bodies in response. Often the participants discussed the fact that they had been commented on personally; although comments from men did not have to be directed specifically toward themselves but could gain power by being observed happening to another woman; watching another woman being commented on, either positively or negatively, became information against which to evaluate the self, to compare, or compete.

Conversations regarding pressures from men became complicated by the realization that not all men like thin women, and that men's preferences were often related to ethnicity/race. Although most groups mentioned this fact, the awareness of different standards by ethnicity seemed to have different meanings for the groups. White women seemed to mention the fact that Black and Latino men preferred "thick" women with a type of outsider curiosity; perhaps because it was a preference which did not necessarily directly, personally, effect them:

-White participants' focus group:

It's funny cuz I think it just like cuts across cultures or something, I think if you gave this, uh, I don't know, to a *Spanish guy* and you showed him, or a *Black guy*, and you showed him this girl he's be like "eww" you know "that's not what I want," like in the movie, um, *Devil's Advocate* like she took off her robe in the end or something and like she's really thin, and like, no, I don't know, like a little girl to me, and like all the guys in the audience are like "oh please put a Black girl up there she looks much better she'll have

.

some hips and butt" you know. It's like that, a *White guy* would rather have that, like, I don't know, i think, *it's weird* when you think about it.

While for the majority of White participants the differences in ethnic preferences were "weird," Latina and Black participants tended to mention the different standards with ambivalence, and perceived the conflict of being expected to live up to all standards at once. These participants discussed these differences with a seriousness which may be indicative of the various consequences they may face depending on which preference or standard they chose to fit into or live up to:

-Black participants' focus group:

I also think it's the environment too that you're in because like um the magazines and everything they portray the Barbie doll look, but there's a lot of men, well I'll use I'll use *Black men*, they don't want that, they want like the big butt, and the big breasts (umhms) then, you know what I mean?

And you *can't stand it*

Exactly

I can't stand it do you understand what I'm sayin?

.....

Yeah, it's very *confusing* it's like you never know what, well you at a point where you ok *you're perfect the way you are because you'll just never be perfect*. Like you know I might see something that's wrong with me and then you know, like I go to my job you know and there's mostly *Hispanic Hispanic males* working there, you know and I think about, and I work at a restaurant, and if I'm walking by the kitchen and you see all of them going (whistles) and I'm like, ok, hold up, I'm not wearing nothing but a, some pants and you know and a shirt, ok, so *how do you they see me*, you know, *I get all this all this attention and I'm, and I'll go out on the street and you know I see all these people walking around Manhattan and they don't ever look at me that way, so you never to know you know (umhms) you don't*

It's *confusing*, yeah, like I was saying I could see a whole bunch of *Spanish and Black guys* standing on the corner and if I'm coming down the block (other participants make whistle sounds) I'll cross the street because I know that they're gonna say something, but if I was walkin down the same block and I saw a whole bunch of *White males* on the corner, I wouldn't pay it no mind (yeahs, uhhuhs) I would just, even though, I'm thinking that, I'll get the same you know treatment or whatever but I don't know what makes me do it, you know? It's like, I don't know what it is, it's

They probably won't even notice when you pass by. You understand, while the other guys they do alot

I don't know why I do it, you know

It's kind of, it's just *crazy, that can drive you crazy* because you you never can get to a point where you be perfect, and you know it's not like we, you know I don't think I'm interested in a *White male* I don't think you're all interested in a *White male*, but *it still makes a difference* (umhms) *what they think*, for some reason (umhms), you know, but it is, *it is crazy*.

This particular discussion is illustrative of the many levels of conflict and expectation that these women perceive and experience. The conversation, beginning with the awareness of different standards and preferences of men by ethnicity, moved into a discussion of the various treatments these participants receive in relation to their physical presence. The statements which present the idea of "never knowing" where one stands (since messages conflict) and therefore "you're perfect the way you are because you'll just never be perfect," may inform the types of stories Black participants wrote in the first section of the study. In one day the participants may experience the expectations of many divergent preferences and responses, and are not sure how to respond in more ways than just physical appearance and style. This discussion speaks to the complexities of the self in relation to one's environment, and these participants describe how many Women of Color walk in many worlds at once. These issues are reaching into the core of women and complicating the notion of beauty standards and the stress which accompanies them. In addition, the options open to Women of Color offer even a smaller range of possibilities than the feminist notion of the double-bind. There are too many conflicting do's and don'ts for which one can be damned; and it seems that simultaneity of oppression also means multiple-binds.

Many of the topics the participants' discussed, regarding pressures from men, were focused on comments participants had directed towards them from men. A few groups also discussed these comments in relation to, or with examples indicating, sexual harassment; and how words can have a profound effect on the sense of self. One group of Latina participants moved from a discussion of how men "look" first, into a conversation of what to do when they "say" something:

Most of the time they actually try to get your attention, and if they can't then they bad things (yeahs yeahs) you ignore em. I mean, in the first pl, *who told you to give me a compliment?* And if I, I'm not gonna give it to you, you know like say "Oh thank you" then *they'll say something nasty*, so, just walk away, I don't even bother to think about what they say.

Well I'm the type of person that uh, like *I keep words in my head* or whatever, like when they say something I won't, *it'll keep running in my mind and I'll remember*.

.....

What if something specifies something, like, let's say you have a *complex* about like your legs or something, and then someone says and makes a *comment*, then, you know, cuz I remember one time I was walking down the street, and, um, I have a big butt, so I'm eating, like, burger King or something, and this man is like, I'm walking, and he goes, in Spanish he says, "Tsk, whatever you eat is gonna go straight to your pants"

Who said that?

You're kidding

Yeah, it's when you, when they say something like they or they just say oyyoiyoi, you have a nice bubble, I mean that's not what I'm talkin abou, I'm talking about when they say something *nasty*, you think, you know, i don't know but

It's like *playing on on what you're insecure about*, you know. And then *it's in your head and you keep thinking about it*. But, like, if it's something like "hi" or "baby" or whatever then whatever you ignore it but it, you know, if it's something that you're sensitive about, you *internalize it, just like when we look at these pictures you know and let's say we're not as skinny as the models we're like...ok, we look at the pictures whatever and then, start thinking about it like later on*, like "oh wow I'm not as skinny as her" or "I'm not as pretty as her so I'm not as good as her" you know? And and it can follow that that chains//

These discussions illustrate a deep understanding of the processes of *internalization*, and how one's environment and experiences are in continuous relation with one's innermost self and sense of self worth. All nine groups had such stories to tell, experiences to share, insecurities to divulge; and often these "embarrassments" were discussed in relation to comments they had had directed towards them personally. The recounting of personal experiences then often led to discussions of how men's comments could be directed toward another woman, and still be experienced personally. Observing men's gaze, hearing comments directed toward another, led to comparisons with other women. Like reflections bouncing from mirror to mirror, men's preferences and comments triggered responses between women:

-Latina participants' focus group:

...The guys compare (yeahs)

Yeah they do, they like "Oh cuz I like this in a girl," and you know, you be like, "Oh I don't have that whatever," so, *you look at what they like*

.....

Yeah, that's like when a girl walks into a room *everybody's looking at her up and down*
Mostly *girls*

But I think girls look at them, because I notice everything I mean the weight, what they're wearing, their shoes (yups, laughter) you know, and the guys, they don't notice that, they just, and the girl's like "You see what she was wearing?" (laughter) // and the guys are like "I don't even notice that," they looking at something else, but *we're so picky with eachother you know?* (yeahs).

Many groups spoke of being aware of other women through others' responses to her. Often the "popular girl" of high school was recollected, watching women being watched on the street, and so on. In addition, these experiences seem to hold such meaning that even the presence of another woman was enough to trigger comparison with her. Although most groups offered men as the first outsider/other as the impetus for negative feelings toward the self, participants had more intense and articulate responses regarding relationships to other women.

Women

Participants in all nine groups discussed other women as bodies to compare with/against, as competition, and as being highly critical of one another. Simply viewing a "beautiful woman" was felt as intimidating, and participants discussed how seeing such a woman could ruin their whole day. In addition, participants spoke of viewing women whom they perceived as less attractive than themselves, and how criticizing such women was a way of "comparing down" in order to make oneself feel better. These responses are illustrative, to an extent, of theories discussing upward and downward comparisons; however, it seems that the participants do not feel a sense of conscious control in the choice to compare up or down. Rather, they discuss these responses as being precipitated by events beyond their control, and totally dependent on who walks in the room or on the

train, especially when they are viewing other women alone. Participants discussed judging and criticizing other women as an occurrence more likely to take place when in the company of other women friends. It seems that the inclusion in a group gives the viewers more power to criticize the outsider. Unfortunately, however, comparisons and competition were not limited to strangers, but close relations (especially thinner friends) were also frequently mentioned as sources of stress and pain.

Strangers on the Train

Comparing and competing with strangers was a theme discussed by all groups. Participants discussed viewing strangers in public places and feeling personally devalued in relation to the woman being viewed. The interaction with, or observation of, another woman could be only momentary; but its effects could reach through an entire day. Feelings of intimidation by beautiful women were most often discussed in relation to being alone, or seeing a beautiful woman when not in the company of known or close others. The most frequent shared experience among all groups was of the "woman on the train":

-Black participants' focus group:

As a woman you always *finding competition* you always I mean no matter how beautiful I think I am sometimes I go out on the street I get on the train I go "Oh my god that girl is very pretty" (yeahs, umhms) you know and I'm like, and I know you know if I *if I were to go a on a beauty pageant with her she will win* (umhms) that's the thing, so you always have a *competition, how can you think you're the most beautiful, you're so beautiful*, you know you always have someone that's you know gonna, but it's just, you know that's a lie that's a lie

Or you see somebody (laughs) you can't you can *you know feel good about yourself* when you leave the house (yeahs) like "Oooh I really look alright today," get a couple of *compliments*, and then you sit there on the train like you said and *you see somebody that just look better than you* (umhms) and like *she just ruined your whole day* (laughter, yeahs)

How dare she?!

This excerpt illustrates the commonly shared theme of "that woman" who seemed to emerge from nowhere and pose immediate competition. She had the power, only due to her perceived beauty, to ruin one's whole day and change one's experience of the self

from positive to negative with only a momentary glance. The mention of the beauty pageant, how "she will win," is an incredible indication of the sense that one is continually being judged from the outside on one's appearance. It is not just "that woman" who is engendering this response, but 1) a sense of the self-in-relation to her and 2) the sense of the self-*and-her* in relation to imagined judges. Women's gazes seem to be focused on many points from many perspectives at once; perceiving others, watching how others view others, and imagining how they themselves are being viewed.

This gendered-theme was shared by all groups, and only one group of Black women discussed the perception of the "other woman" in regards to ethnicity/race and the different standards of the body. The theme of intimidation moved into criticizing other women, and this one conversation was marked by the critique as related to different standards:

...With woman it's more or less you feel *intimidated* by them in one way or another if they look better than you do, or if they don't look better than you then that might even make you feel better, actually (laughter, umhms) you know but men, with men it's kind of more like being liked by them, but with woman it's a different thing, you know, like that, I don't think anybody wants to be, you know, nobody really cares about being liked by a woman but sometimes I feel *intimidated* or you know

I think we're made to // all *confusing our minds* (laughs)

Yeah I'm *tired* sometimes I just feel like

It's like, like I was sayin about, like a lot of *Black and Hispanic men* want you to have like, ok let's take the big ass, they want you to have a big behind, so it's like, ok um you could see a *White woman*, cuz it's like they have this // that *White women*, all of them have you know *flat behinds* whatever, so it's like I could see one a *White woman on the train* with a friend and be like how could she wear that, she doesn't, you know what I mean? like how could she wear, she's not knowing somebody that's looking at her, with that (umhms, laughter) you know say something, it's you know it just *has me all confused* like I wouldn't do that or you know it just has me confused. It has me really confused.

An interesting statement in this excerpt is the observation that "nobody really cares about being liked by a woman." Other women are not perceived as potential friends but as physical enemies. The pressures of physical standards are based on the division of women

and survives on women's competition with one another; this competition not only prevents women from becoming friends, but interferes with already existing friendships.

Friends through Thin and Thick

The gendered-themes of competition with strangers often led into discussions of relationships with friends as marked by tension based on weight. This theme only arose in one of the discussions by Black women, once in a discussion by Latinas, and were the most prevalent in the White groups (2 groups held discussions). White participants were the most likely to discuss comparing themselves with thinner friends, and that their friends' perceptions/dislikes of their own selves led them to wonder, "What does she think of me?":

-White participants' focus group:

I have a friend, she's like a size zero in like pants you know and everything and she goes to me "I have to lose weight I have to lose weight" and everything and *I'm looking at myself* like "Oh my god what is she talking about, *look at me*, what is she thinking about, *I must look humongous to her* or something," and *then I don't wanna hang out with her because I know she's gonna keep complaining and//*

-White participants' focus group:

...I have this friend, she's forever saying "Oh I gotta lose weight I gotta lose weight" but she's perfect (yeahs) she got like, small thighs but they have a shape, with meat on them, she could wear any outfit and look good in it, and she's she's complaining of how she's fat // (laughter)

.....

When you // that, and people are bigger than them, it's like you you have like this skinny girl who's like crying fat to her friend who's like way bigger than her, how does that *that's like*
saying you're reeaally fat

Exactly

"If I think I'm fat"

She's ten times skinnier than me and she's like "I'm so fat" and I'm like, "*What the hell, how the hell do you see me? Like I must be huge in your eyes* (laughter)

The sense of comparison and competition is evident in these excerpts, as well as a more personal and painful question of how that friend actually perceives you. These

comparisons divide not only strangers but close friends, as the body becomes the measure of how honest a friend is. They are not only looking at how a friend physically looks and how that friend is perceived by others; but the friend's perception of herself is then understood as an indicator of what that friend "really thinks of you": If she says you are beautiful the way that you are, is she telling the truth? If her body is closer to the ideal than your own, she could not possibly be. This is also illustrative of how one's own inward gaze and experience of the self can influence relationships with, and experiences of, those closest of others. The inward gaze that women feel so personally is co-creating and maintaining a body-focused environment for themselves and their close friends.

Co-Criticism

These experiences of comparison were characterized by participants as sources of anxiety and depression. The perception of being harmed by the presence of beautiful women was also matched with a tendency to criticize other women on the basis of their physical appearance. Participants commonly stated the perception that women were each other's worst enemies in this regard. Participants spoke of how women judged other women, and voiced the sense that it was wrong; that such behaviors were not only unproductive but divisive, and that although they did it to others they did not agree with it. Participants discussed criticizing other women more as a response rather than an unsolicited injustice; they "knew" that they themselves were being judged, and so criticizing other women was seen as their only defense.

-Latina participants' focus group:

Yeah you go in a club I mean I know *my friends and I we sit at the table and we start criticizing everybody* (umhms), the girls with little shirts and they got these little flabby //, I'm not gonna wear that and I have her stomach too you know (laughter) it's it's so, *it's mean, but I do it anyways*, and, you know (yeahs) *but we don't want it done to us* (umhms). *I guess we gotta change first if we want the others to change, but, I don't know if that's gonna happen. You know, how do you do it and why do, why does*

I was gonna say it could happen like that too like you you like oh god I wouldn't even wear that or or see like a real pretty girl that you feel so *intimidated* that you're like

"Oh she thinks she's all that" (umhms) you know? and somethings like that as well. And I mean, while *she could be like the sweetest person* (yeahs)...

It's disturbing. It is disturbing cuz I know there are times where, you know, *I think we wanna fix the problem, but we don't know how to go about it cuz sometimes very unconsciously we're just staring at someone on the train and we're criticizing them in our mind*, you know, and I know that happens to my friend and I all the time, we're on the train together, and we're looking at the same girl who just walked in the car (laughs) and *we're criticizing her in our minds*, and then, when she gets off, be like "Did you see what she was wearing? Oh my god" you know (yeahs, umhms) so *it's something that we do so unconsciously, it's it's very hard to change, we want to but I don't know how to go, personally, I don't know how to stop. Sometimes I'm like, "ok, stop" you know but* (right) *it it's wrong*

It's bad (umhms)

This excerpt is illustrative of a few processes of which participants are aware. Not only do they discuss the activity itself, but they also examine the psychology. For example one participant, "Gloria," who explains that intimidation often leads to criticism ("Oh she thinks she's all that") indicates the highly personal experiences women are having with strangers. This is not about women being "catty" or nasty; but an "unconscious" response to someone who has socially been defined as a threat, a competitor. Judging other women harshly then maintains the divide by feigning connection; women are forging bonds with select individuals through the disparagement of other women. It seems that these participants had such a strong sense of being judged by others that they felt it necessary to seize any opportunity which allowed them to be in the position of judge, and to judge in their favor. One group articulated the duality of comparison, and how they are led to positions of either better or worse:

-White participants' focus group:

But then you also compare yourself, *you may compare yourself to the huge ugly women but then you compare yourself to beautiful models that are everywhere*

Well, not necessarily (laughter) you could stop right there, you don't have, sometimes you do both though, *you feel better when you see these other people but then you look at these other*

I'll do

that a lot. Like I'll see somebody walking with an outfit I wish I could wear and that *that just brings me right back down so*

It's like you feel more worse seeing that person as better (yeahs) then you feel better seeing the person that's worse off

Participants are very aware of the comparison processes they are engaging in, as well as the consequences of comparing for themselves and others. One of the most disturbing recurring themes is the sense of powerlessness that these women present; to the extent that they overtly disagree with what is going is on but feel helpless to disengage from it. The participants in this study offered a sense of forced engagement, that they had no choice but to engage in these struggles, since they were going to be judged whether they agreed with it or not. From strangers to friends, the closeness of these comparisons continues into family for the Latina participants.

Family

Latina participants were the only groups which mentioned family members as a source of comparison and judgement. As in their stories and the words they used to describe themselves-in-relation to family, Latina participants present the family as one of their main sources through which to experience the self. Latinas often discussed comments from family members, comparing themselves to other family members, or being explicitly compared by family members. The stories of being compared to other family members or friends were often met with commiserating laughter by other participants.

Yeah, even your family, like somebody's like

Exactly (laughter, yeahs)

like "Oh you're gaining weight" (laughs)

Yeah

That's true

relatives, cousins

"//Look at your butt!!//"

gonna//

They start comparing you maybe to friends & (yeahs) or to your cousins (yeahs, umhms) or to your aunts that are young and have wonderful bodies and, you know, it happen to just // yeah

This focus on family was absent from Black and White women's stories, while emergent throughout Latina groups' discussions and stories. The presence of the family as

a major aspect in Latinas' discussions may be indicating the unique familial relationships among Latinas and the institution of the family. Latina participants mentioned many moments and experiences with the family in which they felt very aware of their bodies, and felt their perceptions of themselves as tightly tied to the family's perception of them.

The prevalence of social comparisons among women with "every-day" people -- strangers, friends, family -- adds an important dimension to research on images of women and social comparison. The images themselves are indeed a focus of comparison; however, the day-to-day interactions among women in which these standards have been applied indicate the depths of social comparison and that it is not limited to the presence of such imagery. The internalization of the images, the projections onto other women, and the consequential effects on personal relationships is alarming. Participants, through discussions with each other, articulated a growing awareness of the interrelationships of the social and personal; and actively try to reconcile the need for personal confidence and the pressures they are feeling socially.

Personal and Social Fit

The awareness of social pressures, social interactions, and social images was complicated by discussions of personal character and confidence. All groups discussed issues of personal character, although there were some differences between the groups. Latina and Black women were the most likely to discuss issues of personal character, as well as discussing the complex relation of personal character to social pressure or structure; while White women tended to provide cursory comments, rather than in depth discussions, on "just being yourself." In addition, White women tended to remain with the notion that "it's just the way it is" and the only way to feel good was to achieve "the look."

Latina and Black Participants often offered personal confidence, just "being yourself," and "not caring" what other people think, as solutions to the problems of social expectations and pressures. Recognizing inner beauty often emerged in the conversations; however, through discussion participants were more likely to relate inner strength to social

situatedness. Participants, initially having a tug of war between the social and the personal, occasionally were able to make the connections and discuss the complexities of the social-individual.

-In one group, comprised of Black participants, "Ronda" navigates through these ideas:

I think it's *friends, people around you*. I know when I was in high school it was basically like that, all the boys would talk about one girl, and usually the prettiest girl in school was this girl with green eyes and long hair and they considered that pretty, and if you put her, if she was darker skinned and she had shorter hair or whatever, she wouldn't have been as, prettier than anybody else, they wouldn't have considered her as pretty as anybody else or whatever whatever. You know I think it's *all in who you think you are, or whatever*, just like you said, you have to decide who you, who you think you are and if you, and if you think you're pretty or whatever I think *that'll show off to everybody*, I don't think there's, *you have to worry about what everybody else thinks* (yeahs, umhms)

It's confidence

Having that *confidence, it'll attract alot of positive attention*, no matter you big, small, whatever, it's just having that *confidence*

And loving yourself for who you are...

Interestingly, this conversation began with Ronda's focus on environment, those around you, and how they respond to you. Realizing that others are not always reliable measures of the self (especially when the measuring stick changes on every block), the conversation moved to not paying attention ("if you think you're pretty"); this moved even further away from physical appearance to personal character and confidence, ending in loving yourself for "who" you are. Black participants were more likely to stress loving oneself, having confidence, and being "who you are." Latina participants also discussed personal confidence, but also described how one's confidence is related to other people, and their perception that personal confidence was not necessarily enough to make it in this world.

-Latina participants' focus group:

But I think it makes *a lot of like how much you listen to all that negative stuff*. Because if you're a person that, like for instance, you said like that fat, you know, that fat

bitch whatever, I, let's say for instance, li she can be, someone can be walking down and say that but if you *paying mind* to that and *you pay attention to what they're saying then that's gonna bring you down, but if you're the type of person* that when you know well they don't know me and they don't know what I'm all about so they *pay it no mind*, then I don't it plays much int, comes much into the play, cuz, I mean, all of us, I'm pretty sure, we have *confidence in ourselves regardless*, cuz it, I mean, *unfortunately some people don't have it, but some, most of us do, and that's what we pay, you should pay more attention to, not to like the negative stuff that other people gotta say cuz they're not living our lives, we are* (umhms). ... Yeah, like, yeah to work definitely on your *confidence level* I mean, just, to *disregard* what everyone else says. It's so important, because we are all, a lot, I'm pretty sure, *a lot of us base on like, what he or she said, and that that we're, that's like a major part of our lives so, what did he say what did she say, and stuff like, a lot of times we shouldn't, we shouldn't pay no mind to that.* And probably if we don't pay a mind to that that's probably a step as in trying to, like, what you were talking about, to make it better for ourselves.

Yeah, there has to be a *balance*. You don't, you shou, well, you you might to not pay attention to to people like that, they are, they are no good, they don't know you you don't know them, do they know where // comes from, you know, so, you you you cou, like change your body if you want to get, *if you want to get something, for, you have to get something and the only way you can do it is by changing.* But, not, because, because people are telling you like, you know, *if I want to get a really, a really good job they can say you know, you have to like, lose weight, I'll do it. But I'll get paid.* But

Although personal confidence and inner beauty are considered important, there is little room to claim it; in the realm of personal strength, losing weight for a job is then viewed as a personal action rather than compliance with social expectations. In addition, another area of discussion indicated the difficulty of maintaining personal confidence; and that feeling good about oneself is strongly related to the need for acceptance and love.

All You Need Is

Many groups discussed the very real, and often trivialized, need for attention, recognition, and love as the essential needs which they felt impelled them to try and meet body standards. For these participants, it was perceived that the surest way for a woman to receive love and attention was through being beautiful. In addition, many women also offered the belief that one will get even more than those basic needs met when one is beautiful. Although all ethnic groups expressed these sentiments, the tenor of the discussions were different. White women tended to "state the obvious," and did not proceed into any further theorizing, analyses, or discussion of structure. Black women, on

the other hand, were the most articulate regarding how these feelings were interwoven with the social representation of women.

-White participants' focus group:

...We want other people to *like us*, looks, like, men to say *you know you look beautiful or something*

You need *recognition*, you know, you want someone to just like, I guess everyone wants to be the *center of attention*, and you know, if they look good then like people turn around, you know, and *say like look at her*, and you know, you look back and I don't know, it's for *attention*

To get *attention*// (laughs)

It's *psychological*

[R: Of course, what human wouldn't want attention?]

And *love*

And that's how you get *love*, so, that's, *whatevers gonna get you love is, that's where your // modifications are gonna be*

Yes, I think men first look at how you look, how you

I mean like, if they change their body, more men are, you know, gonna like want them, so they'll *do that for love*. *A man can love them only when they change, so then they'll change for that, you know, just for the love that they'll get.*

This group discussion not only brought the conversation into what participants considered to be its bare psychological bones (the need for love and attention), but fleshed it out through their sense that men can only love women when they change, and that the main area of change was the body. Many discussions presented some form of this idea; the need to be liked and given attention, and that a woman-as-is was not going to be the recipient of the desired recognition. Another group of White women took this sentiment further, discussing their belief that beautiful people also prosper in other areas of life:

I don't know you'd just have so much more *confidence* to to do things, like

Prettier

people are treated better

Right.

They get more out of life, know what I mean

When I sit in my car I get away with murder, like a long long line of traffic and guys'll let me go through all the time, stuck in traffic, I even get free drinks and I'm like "Wow and I'm not that thin."

While Black participants focused on having inner confidence, a confidence which emanates from the self, White participants perceived confidence as something one could achieve through physical beauty. Here, personal confidence is connected to physical beauty, which is then connected to treatment by others. "Perks" of the appreciation of beauty means getting "more out of life." A group of Black women also discussed the connection between approval and the ability to "use" one's body; however, this discussion indicates a stronger awareness of the structure of this "reality.":

Yeah, just wanna fix it to get their approval or something to that effect, and like sometimes we wish we look like everybody but ourselves (umhms)

Because I think there's a // to assimilate to be accepted and into the society, like um people have this view where um if you're not a certain size or I mean height, certain complexion, uh then you know you're not good enough or something is wrong with you and you're not that, then you know, people tend to like you more. You know, and they like so, like people, like woman, I think that's why we we take all these things into consideration because we wann be liked by other people (umhms)

.....

This is our tool, our bodies are our tool, but men, you know, they don't need their bodies (yeahs, umhms) you know, as long as they have they (umhms, yeahs) they ok (laughs)

This discussion also recognizes the need for love, and the ability for women to use their bodies as a tool; however, the tenor of the conversation was more critical than the White women's discussions. For example, the inclusion of the idea of assimilation seems key; an understanding of a system in operation which one can only join by fitting into certain specifications and abiding by pre-set regulations. The strength of the conflict between confidence and acceptance became clear when participants were asked how they would respond to a woman who indeed did like herself, did not pay attention to the comments of others, and had no desire to change. Personal confidence and social acceptance were then complicated by conceit.

Conceit (aye, the I Conundrum!)

The struggle to like the self, to disregard negative comments, and to be a confident individual were jarred by the perception of such a fictional woman as being one of two

things: conceited, or lying to cover low self-esteem. All groups responded with some version of these themes, which pushes the options for women pretty much out the window. Although there was the shared gender-theme of conceit and/or lying, there were some differences between the groups in their analyses of this response. The most striking differences included the resurfacing of White women's unquestioning acceptance of the body standards for women; and Black women's tendency to question the responses rather than simply in engaging in them.

It seems that the need to be loved not only means changing the body, but actively maintaining a sense of oneself as not good enough. Although all groups expressed sincere and strong desires to like themselves, as well as to end the divisive behavior of criticizing other women, there was almost total disbelief that any woman could truly like herself; and if she did, there must be something wrong with her. More importantly, one could not take the risk of liking oneself since that would increase the possibility of being perceived as conceited, an egoist; and too much confidence is unladylike.

-Black participants' focus group:

She's lying (laughing)

She's conceited

She's lying she's lying she probably has the lowest self-esteem in the whole world (laughing) she's lying

Yeah, liftin herself up

Usually people who have low self-esteem that's how they block it, you know they say "I think," oh please (yeahs, laughter) they're not, not they're lying, no they're lying, definitely there's no question!!

The energy with which all groups explained this "fact," and made the attribution of conceit, was consistent among all groups. A group of Latina participants also focused on the issue of lying in order to make oneself feel better; indicating the perception that the more a woman claims to be happy with herself, the more she actually dislikes herself; in addition, to be so confident is perceived as a character flaw in a woman.

-Latina participants' focus group:

They're *lying* (laughter)

The only thing, I don't know, to me *someone with that type of confidence has so much wrong with them, like, they must dislike a lot of things but kinda try to put up this front, like to convince themselves (yeahs) by saying it. Like, "No I don't have this defect cuz yes I'm beautiful" and all that*

Like if you say it a lot of times you finally believe it (laughter)

One group of Black women discussed the issue of conceit as well as critiqued it, directing the conversation closer to the conflict that women have in their efforts to love themselves:

...you'd be conceited, cuz like, "yeah, I am the bomb, my body is like, beautiful," she'd be like looking at you "You're shallow" (laughter)

Why do people think that if you say "I'm the bomb I'm so beautiful I could get any man I wanted" they think you're all a sudden egotistic

Well you are

No you're not!

But that's because

Not the part about thinking you're beautiful but thinking you could get anyman you wanted if your, your personality is a little

ok maybe that part

Little *too high up*

But still, if you think you're beautiful, and you like yourself the way you are, you should have no problem with it, and if people, and you should have problem with expressin it, but then people get offended when you start expressing yourself (umhms)

These participants did not abandon the idea of being a "little too high up," but did acknowledge that personal confidence is sometimes mistaken for conceit; and that one should be able to express oneself. The White women's discussions also recognized that confidence can hold negative consequences for women; especially when the level of one's confidence is "mismatched" in relation to one's physique. The following excerpt, from a focus group of White participants, indicates the perils of liking oneself when one does not fit into the accepted standard of beauty. "Sue" began the conversation and held firm:

What would I say? Honestly? "Congratulations you bitch" (laughter)

Yeah yeah "good for you"

In a sarcastic way, I'd say "that's a very good job" you know "I'm happy for you." You know the bitch part I would say sarcastically, but you know I would say congratulations and compliment her you know

I think I wouldn't be jealous of her body or what she looked like, I'd be jealous of her outlook

I'd be not jealous, envious, of you know the effort she puts in and all that to keep herself together

But even if she didn't look as good as she thought she did? You know, I would be like I would be like, "You got it wrong" (laughter) I'm a straight-up honest person. If like you think you are like got such a nice body I would tell you if you're right or wrong...in a nice way

But you see these talk shows and there are these 300 pound women saying "I feel great about myself" it's like oh I'm glad she does cuz, *you don't wanna see anyone get heavy* (laughter) but it's like, but if I looked like that (laughter) god forgive me *I'd be miserable* you know, I would just, *it's like great that people can have that self-confidence, and I'd like to feel that way all the time too, but if I was largely overweight I wouldn't feel that way.*

I would tell the person, because, I mean, everyone laughs, you don't want your friend to go out looking ridiculous, I mean

[R: What if that person said "I don't believe in your standard of beauty?"]

Then I'll bring all these people to tell her she's wrong (laughter)...I would feel it as *my part of a friend, to help you, you know, and help myself at the same time.*

This conversation did not extricate itself from the acceptance of the standards of the body, and seemed to focus on the responses available within a culture which is hostile to large women. Sue was very adamant about "protecting" her friend from a cruel world, and was as insistent that she was "only being honest;" in other words, this is the honest situation, this is how it is, and people get hurt when they think they are something they are not. The only way to protect oneself and one's friends is through the achievement of the accepted standards.

The social comparisons that women were discussing are tightly tied to very intense emotional and personal struggles which they are forced to embody. The majority of the themes are shared among participants, but the analyses and responses are varied by ethnicity/race; indicating even more nuance in the relationships to images, other women, and themselves.

Discussion

Framework

The goal of this research centered on expanding the area of body image research and reconceptualizing some of the basic theories which have guided this area of study. The focus of this reconceptualization is based on the absence of Women of Color from the beginning of body image research; and this absence is considered not only to have excluded the majority of women from major theories and research, but to have influenced the findings on Women of Color through interpretations which were grounded in White-biased theories.

Issues which have been the crux of White-feminist body image research have focused on the pressures of women to be thin; and from this perspective Women of Color (especially women of African descent) have been heralded as the great resisters to social imagery since they do not exhibit the same weight-focused psychology as White women. Women of Color were theorized to be adherent to differing sub-cultural standards which in turn made them immune to dominant-popular imagery, and so could once again be left at the margins of body image research.

The relationships between "sub"-cultural and dominant-cultural standards have been relatively ignored. Ethnic membership and identification have often been presented as "sub"-cultural and so removed from dominant culture, rather than located within the active relationships between and among all social groups. Such theorizing is considered to be essentialist and dangerous for Women of Color in that they are based in racist conceptions of group identification. In addition, these conceptions are also based in the assumption that culture is a stagnant and static entity in which individuals reside and respond, but do not actively participate.

This work, on the other hand, is based on the theoretical assumption that individuals and culture are not only interactive, but that "sub"- and dominant cultural moments are always in relation and co-creating present experiences. Therefore, any observed shift or change in one indicates a change in the relationships among all. The

major shift observed, and the focus of this work, is changes in dominant-popular imagery, which have begun to focus on the inclusion of Women of Color. These changes may then be forging, or forcing, new relationships among women, ethnic identity and membership, and experiences of the body.

On the basis of this theoretical stance the research was highly exploratory, and themes which emerged from the data were central to analyses and interpretation. This research has located three meta-themes in the area of the body in relation to media representations of women. In addition, these themes further locate women's experiences in relation to their ethnic identities and experiences. The women in these groups shared many perceptions, attributions, and experiences in relation to their gender status. These shared themes indicate shared experiences as women; however, distinct relationships and perceptions of these themes indicate distinct experiences as members of specific ethnic groups. Commonalities of gendered experience were documented, but the preferences and experiences became more complex once analyzed through ethnicity and race.

The main themes which emerged will be discussed in regard to these shared gender-themes and the themes which were divergent on the basis of ethnic identification:

- 1) The *perception* of the body as women's primary identifier and measure of worth is perceived by all participants; however, the *responses* to such an awareness are distinct by ethnicity, as are the major foci of their experiences of their own bodies.
- 2) The perception of dominant-popular media standards and representations of women is similar among all groups; however, the responses to these images differ by ethnicity with Latina and Black women critiquing and questioning these standards while White women tended to accept them. In addition, Latina and Black women were more likely to discuss issues of social structure, social issues, and misrepresentations of ethnicity, while White women worked within the structures without analyzing them.
- 3) all participants were highly articulate regarding the social comparison processes they engage in on the basis of physical appearance, and how these comparisons are related to dominant-popular imagery.

The Body

The information gathered for the body section indicates that Latina, Black, and White women have similar perceptions of what the body means for women: the body is viewed in parts, and the experiences of the body revolve around weight and puberty. The characterizations of these shared themes and experiences, however, are distinctive to each group with Latinas' stories focusing on issues of puberty, Black women being the most positive or neutral, and White women being the most negative and focused on weight. In relation to these findings, Latina, Black and White participants had different words they used to describe themselves, which helps to situate the stories and their experiences of their bodies. These findings, however, do not indicate the meta-themes and contexts in which these participants are making these characterizations. Viewed alone these findings present a story, viewed in relation to the participant's perspectives on media and culture these findings present a saga.

In accordance with previous research (Parker et al., 1995; Poran, 1997), there were differences among Latina, Black and White women's experiences of their own bodies. The stories which participants wrote focused on weight and puberty issues, with a few falling into an "other" category (such as health and addiction). These themes, although shared by participants, were distributed and characterized differently. In addition, participants from all groups tended to mention specific ages or grades in school which marked for them the "moment" of their body awareness; and often these moments were characterized by the presence of others, comments from others, or comparisons with others.

Latina participants' stories focused on issues of puberty, including menstruation and sexuality or becoming sexualized. This may be an indication of Latinas' awareness regarding stereotypes geared toward them. Latinas are the targets of conflicting stereotypes regarding their sexuality (Florez-Ortiz, 1995; Hurtado, 1995), caught between the Latino stereotype of, or pressure to remain, the "innocent virgin," and the U.S. White

male view of Latinas as sexually "mature," and animalistic (Rivera, 1997). These conflicting expectations, or characterizations, of Latinas may be heightening their awareness of puberty since puberty is typically associated with sexuality. Therefore, Latinas' awareness of "becoming" sexual, and embodying sexuality, seem to be intertwined with how Latinas have been sexualized by others. Latinas embody the conflicting expectations, and puberty is likely the time those expectations come to the fore.

In addition, although the main themes in Latinas' stories revolved around puberty, weight concerns were mentioned in the majority of their stories as well. Their stories also contained negative attributions of experiences of the body. Latinas were the most likely to discuss their feelings being triggered by a negative comment from another, as well as family members. There is a definite sense of being forced to look at oneself and to monitor the body. To locate these stories in the social histories, as well as stereotypes, of Latinas indicates how these participants' experience and embody social pressures regarding the body.

Black women's stories also revolved around issues of weight and puberty, although the stories were more evenly distributed in each category. In addition, the characterizations of their written recollections were also spread across categories. Black women were the most likely to characterize their experiences as neutral, or not to offer explicitly negative words to describe their experiences. These stories are in accordance with previous findings, which indicate that Black women's experiences of their bodies do not carry the emotional intensity around issues of weight as they do for White women (duCille, 1996; Parker et al., 1995). Indeed, White women's stories indicated a focus on weight, with a definite preference for thinness. Their stories were the most negative of all participants.

When participants were asked to describe what they loved and hated about their bodies, in the notecard section of the study, all participants focused on body parts rather than general characterizations or descriptions of instrumental body behaviors/actions.

This tendency for women to see themselves in parts has been well-documented (Cash & Brown, 1989; Franzoi et al., 1989) as objectified body-consciousness (McKinley & Hyde, 1996), and is indicative of the importance which is placed on women's bodies as objects. When participants were asked why they wrote body parts rather than, for example, saying, "I love my body because it is strong," they tended to respond with amazement that there could have been such a possibility. Participants stated that it was "normal" for women to view themselves in pieces.

Black women offered the most amount of words in this section, which may be interpreted as a high level of objectified body-consciousness; however, the placement of the words into categories indicates a more positive relationship to those parts. Although the gendered-theme of body parts was shared among the participants, the distribution of words into the "love" or "hate" categories were distinct; with Black women offering more words for the "love" category than for "hate." Latina and White participants tended to have more words in the "hate" category than in the "love" category. The reduction of the body into parts, although an important indicator of how women's bodies are culturally defined, is not in itself a full measure of women's relationships and experiences with those parts. This complicates the measure of objectified body-consciousness in that the perception of the body in parts is qualified by the characterizations of those parts. In addition, it will be argued that the characterizations of parts are themselves indicators of specific experiences through ethnic identification. This may be a very important finding with regard to how this measure is interpreted and applied.

Although McKinley and Hyde (1996) do acknowledge objectified body consciousness in relation to dominant cultural standards, their focus remains on the extent to which the dominant standards have been internalized by women; not on the specific relationships women have with the dominant standards in relation to their experiences as members of ethnic groups, and their distinct standpoints based on ethnic identification. In other words, although dominant standards may be *perceived* by all women (i.e., all

participants in the study were aware of the standards of beauty indicated by media representations of women as thin), ethnic identification with the meanings of one's own ethnic membership will translate into unique *relationships* with the dominant standards; thereby engendering specific standpoints through which the dominant-popular imagery is experienced.

The **About the Author** section provides valuable information in regard to participants' experiences of themselves in relation to ethnic identification. The unique relationships to dominant imagery may be informed through the words which Latina, Black and White participants in the study used to describe themselves. Common gendered-themes were shared by all groups, especially when describing outward focused traits. In addition, the majority of shared words for inward characteristics also described traits associated with the feminine gender role. Unique words for each group, however, indicated distinct perceptions of the self in relation to ethnicity. These shared and unique words that participants used to describe themselves, in conjunction with the information on the body, may indicate the relationships between gender roles, ethnicity, and experiences of the body.

The majority of shared words, in both the inward and outward focused categories, described feminine gender role characteristics. Previous research has found a relationship between adherence to the feminine gender role and low body esteem (Frederick & Grow, 1996, Jackson et al., 1988; Martz et al., 1995); however, even though many of these gendered characteristics were shared among participants, Black women (in the notecard section) indicated much higher body esteem than White and Latina participants, and Latinas had the lowest esteem. Therefore, the relationship between the feminine gender role and body esteem must be re-considered as operating differently by ethnicity.

The most common words mentioned by participants were descriptions of inner character traits; and those that were unique to each group provided information regarding the participants' experiences of themselves in relation to ethnic identification. Latina

participants tended to describe themselves in relation to family and religion; Black participants tended to use "power" words of independence, leadership and struggle; while White participants tended to use words that were similar to those in the shared category, indicating a sense of the idiosyncratic self. These distinct descriptions of the self, although differing by ethnicity, cannot be separated from what has been termed "gender." Instead, these descriptions indicate the diversity of meanings within gender, or how gender gains meaning from diversity.

It has been proposed that the physical attractiveness stereotype does not operate in the same fashion for women and men. The physical attractiveness stereotype is not one stereotype, but is instead a component of larger gender stereotypes (Bar-Tal & Saxe, 1976; Deaux & Lewis, 1983; 1984), and so operates differently for women and men. Women and men, however, are not uniform categories in themselves. Gender stereotypes have been assumed to operate the same for all women, and all men. The reconceptualization of gender as a component of larger stereotypes based on ethnicity, or as an integral aspect of ethnic identity, then sheds more light on these findings. The unique words for each group may provide information on how the "feminine gender role" means differently for women by ethnicity. Although participants shared many gendered characteristics, their unique descriptions of themselves indicate not only their perceptions of themselves as women, but specifically as Latina women, Black women, and White women. The feminine gender role itself is multifaceted and integral; not a uniform and separate construct. If the physical attractiveness stereotype is a component of the larger gender stereotype, and gender itself is a component of ethnicity, then body satisfaction must be reconceptualized as related to the gendered experiences of ethnicity.

Ethnic/racial identification has indeed been found to be related to body satisfaction (Harris, 1994; 1995). Importantly, however, the meaning of ethnic identification is dependent on the ethnicity with which one identifies. Ethnic identification is meaningful in relation to an ethnicity and everything which comprises the experience of being a member

of a specific ethnic group in a specific moment in history. The stories, notecards, and words that participants have used to describe themselves in this study, indicate unique experiences of the self-as-a-whole; and how self-description and self-perception are interconnected through ethnic and gendered identities. Through the participant's stories and descriptions, both shared and distinct, the focus group discussions become further grounded.

Media

The uniform nature of the media may be misleading as a cultural medium. The mass media, and dominant-popular imagery, can be measured at any point in time for its images and messages. Mass media can be studied for its meanings, for its lessons, and is often studied as a documentation of the zeitgeist of any given period. This form of study may lead one to infer that the response to such imagery is as coherent and uniform as the media itself. When media is instead understood as a specific perspective, designed by those with the funds and power to present their version of the world, one may begin to recognize that the viewer creates more meaning than what is viewed. The messages and images the media creates are indicative of dominant-cultural standards and ideologies. The viewers of these images, however, are uniquely situated in relationships with the social ideologies being represented. Therefore, media representations of members of society cannot be viewed in themselves as measures of social relationships. The social relationships being represented cannot be understood through media; instead, media must be viewed through social relationships.

The findings from this research indicate that participants all shared an understanding and awareness of media presentations and the messages the media intend to confer. All participants were aware of the stereotypical standards of beauty which exist in dominant-popular imagery, and that the women presented as the standard all share specific characteristics (such as thinness). In addition, all groups discussed the feeling of being negatively pressured by these images, and the sense that the images represented a social

expectation of what they themselves should look like. Participants were also very aware of the construction of these images through airbrushing and computer alterations, as well as the construction of women/models through plastic surgery and make-up applications. These perceptions of media intent were a shared-gender theme among all groups; however, responses to the perceived intent diverged by ethnicity/race.

Weight: A Thin Premise

The most distinctive difference between the groups was the inability of White women to move beyond personal response into a discussion of social structure, and their tendency to accept the standards without question, while Latina and Black women actively critiqued the imagery, questioned its messages, and made connections to social issues such as gender inequality, exploitation and discrimination, and racist misrepresentation and essentialism.

Participants all voiced their observations that models are skinny, and that images of women indicate the message that one must be thin in order to be beautiful. The responses to this message, however, differed by ethnicity. Latina and Black women tended to acknowledge this media preference, but critiqued and questioned it, while White women were aware of this presentation and tended to accept it and agree with it. Latina and Black participants attacked the premise, asking why thin=good. Rather than questioning why thin=good, the majority of White women's discussions focused on why fat=bad, indicating an acceptance of the premise.

When Latina and Black women did discuss thinness as a prerequisite for attractiveness (i.e., "it just looks better") they would engage in a discussion of "why's" and "who's": "why" do we think this, and "who" made us believe this. This indicated an awareness of not only the construction of the imagery itself, but the construction of social and personal preferences. Latina and Black participants did voice feeling pressures to be skinny, but rather than focusing on their bodies they turned their attention toward the expectation itself.

This type of focus on structure was prevalent in Latina and Black women's group discussions throughout conversations about the media. While White women's conversations bounced around within the confines of the imagery, Latina and Black women's discussions dug to the bottom and exploded from the top. While being able to question the premise of the standards themselves, Latina and Black participants were also apt to discuss the relationships of these images to social theoretical concerns. Latinas tended to centralize their social critiques on issues regarding U.S. consumerism, while Black participants tended to focus theirs on issues related to race representation. Although these were the main foci of their discussions, both Latina and Black participants addressed the issues of selling, exploitation/discrimination, and race essentialism and misrepresentation.

Social Connections: Exploitation and Discrimination

The awareness of women's bodies being used to sell products was grounded in, or related to, perceptions of the status of women as an oppressed group. Latina and Black women were not only aware that a woman's "sex" can be used to sell merchandise, but that the use of women and women's bodies is tied to social concerns and inequalities. Representations of women were perceived as another way to "keep women down," and maintain inequality. Discussions of exploitation often led into conversations regarding discrimination based on physical appearance. Anecdotes were offered to explicate how physical appearance standards are used against women.

Latina and Black women were also more likely to mention not buying magazines as a method of changing the representation of women. Although there was the sentiment that it is now such an "embedded" part of the "cultural mindset," that it would be very difficult to change, Latina and Black women nevertheless discussed the possibilities of change, and the recognition that if the cultural mindset is constructed, it could be de- and re-constructed. The majority of Latina and Black participants expressed the belief that the representation of women could be changed even if it took a long period of time.

The discussion of "sex sells" was also present for White women, but there was no discussion of why; rather, this tended to be perceived as "the way things are." In one group when a participant began to discuss "unity" among women, she was quickly silenced by another participant who asked "Unity for what?" The idea of boycotting products, magazines and diets was immediately defined as absurd and dropped. This discussion was where the only mention of social structure emerged, and it ended as quickly as it began.

Social Connections: Misrepresentation and Essentialism

The images of women were also critiqued in regards to representations of ethnicity/race. Latina and Black participants were the only groups to mention this issue, voicing their critiques through analyzing specific images, giving anecdotal evidence, and through theorizing. These conversations illustrated the conflict of being included in dominant-popular media imagery, since inclusion has thus far meant misrepresentation and essentialism (duCille, 1996).

Latina and Black participants discussed how inclusion was "positive in a negative way." There was the sense of accomplishment that women of their ethnic groups were being seen and offered as beautiful, but an awareness of the consequences of being represented in one specific type of image. Many participants spoke of variation within their ethnic group, how these women do not represent the "real" Latina or African American woman, and how these images may contribute to present racist assumptions and stereotyping. In addition, participants expressed worry over future generations of girls and women; connecting misrepresentation and essentialism to the construction of cultural mindsets, these participants wondered how young women would feel about themselves if they grew up in a culture where they saw themselves being represented in such a way.

Some participants also focused on specific images which were presented during the study. Black participants were the most likely to focus on and analyze actual images. The majority of the discussions focused on skin tone, especially on one popular model who is very dark. Participants analyzed the color schemes of backgrounds and clothing, how

contrasts were used to "darken" her or make her "glow." Complexion, the even-ness of skin tone and shade were also commented on. The social side of skin surfaced in one discussion of an image of a woman who was lit to be yellow. One participant remarked on her skin being yellow, then clarified herself stating that she meant "literally yellow," and the rest of the participants laughed.

The level of discussion regarding these issues was truly impressive. Participants would theorize together, question one another, and teach/learn/conclude through the discussion process. One particular group of Black women were extremely articulate regarding these issues, and were involved in an amazing and energetic discussion. When they "petered out," there were quite a few moments of silence and so they were asked if they were all talked out, to which they responded "no no, I'm just thinking." This response indicated a serious desire to *explore, understand, and articulate* the topics and issues being discussed.

The conversations regarding misrepresentation and race essentialism illustrate that not only are these theoretical concerns and possibilities offered by theorists, but are real concerns and felt experiences by the Latina and Black women who participated in this study. They are not only feeling these issues and thinking about them, but they are articulating them. The images are in transition and these participants are witnessing this transition and concerned about the consequences; therefore, research must act on this concern. Latina and Black women may be highly articulate of the structures and social issues which surround issues of the body, but that does not necessarily lessen the blows that a sexist/racist culture delivers. The force of impact is evident most in the prevalence of discussions regarding social relationships and comparisons among women; and how physical appearance pressures are damaging to individual women and relationships among women.

Social Comparisons

Social identity and comparison theories were strong components of the theoretical framework of this study. This study was framed by these theories, and the questions were guided by them; nevertheless, the extent to which social comparisons were mentioned by participants in this study was under-anticipated. From the first stories offered by participants, comments by, and comparisons to, others were themes which snaked throughout the discussions. Participants in all ethnic/racial groups in the study revealed that their sense of self was tightly connected to how others perceived and treated them.

Through these discussions emerged one of the most important findings regarding the operation of social comparisons in relation to body imagery: the images themselves indicate the premise, or standard, by and against which comparisons gain their meaning; however the comparisons are not necessarily directly with the images. The majority of early White feminist theory regarding the social representations of women focused on women's direct relationships with images of women (i.e., women look at the images, compare themselves with the women in these images, and then feel inferior in relation to them). A direct, and unidirectional, relationship with images of women was assumed in these theories. The relationship between the images and women's experiences of their bodies has been well-documented; however, there are more levels to this relationship.

The participants in this study did discuss the images as standards, and as eliciting negative body cognitions. Viewing the images themselves engendered comparisons with/against them; however, it is not only with these images that women are comparing. Social comparisons on the physical dimension are not restricted to the images themselves, rather, the comparisons extend to other women during interpersonal interactions. Women are then comparing *other women* to these images, and then comparing themselves with/against women in day-to-day interactions. The images themselves seem to have been internalized as the premise for social comparisons with other women, thereby defining the relationships women have with one another.

The images of women which comprise the premise, the standard of beauty, may then serve as a reminder, a gauge, and when viewing these images, may be compared against. The images themselves, however, need not be present in order for the social comparison process to operate. The premise does not only exist in the images, but has been successfully internalized by women, so they are carrying the knowledge of the premise within them. Other women then are judged in relation to the standard, and embody or fall short of the standard. Other women then become targets for social comparisons.

Social comparisons, as discussed by participants, can occur through a variety of social interactions and relationships; and can engender a variety of emotional responses. Participants described some comparisons as being "forced" through direct or indirect behaviors: directly (through comments by men, friends, or family) or indirectly (observing men's behavior towards other women). All groups discussed similar experiences of making comparisons. Latinas were the most likely to discuss family members as forcing comparisons, while White women were the most likely to include friends (thinner friends) as engendering comparisons. The most prevalent comparisons were those made between women themselves and, depending on context, could be positive or negative.

Positive Criticism

Participants discussed the frequency with which women judge and criticize one another on the basis of physical appearance in order to make "oneself feel better." This "comparing down" was most likely to occur when women were in groups in a social setting such as a club, or with a friend on the train. This activity of group criticism bonded the group together through the negation of another woman.

These emotional outcomes complicate the conception of the social comparison process itself. Social comparison processes are believed to operate in relation to similar others, and have been theoretically understood as serving self-enhancement or protective motivations (Crosby & Zubin, 1990; Major, 1989; 1993; Major et al., 1993). In addition,

comparisons with similar others tend to be matched with a devaluation of out-group members (Klein & Kunda, 1993; Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Social comparisons, however, do not always lead to positive self-evaluations. Participants discussed judging other women, criticizing other women, when in groups of friends in a social setting. Positive self-evaluations seemed to be reachable to participants only through devaluing another; however, even this option does not always seem to be available. The process itself is highly context dependent (Alicke et al., 1995; Crosby, 1984; Suls & Wan, 1987), as are the "similar" others with which one identifies (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The context-dependent nature of social comparison seems to be intricately related to whether a participant compared-down and felt "positive," or compared-up and felt negative.

Comparing down tended to occur when participants were in groups, and had others with whom to commiserate. Comparing up tended to occur when participants were alone. This finding is in line with those of Smith and Spears (1996), that when individual identity is salient, evaluations reflect personal attributes and participants personalize disadvantage; while when in-group identity is salient, participants move away from justifying outcomes on personal terms. Group identity then highlights collective disadvantage and not personal failure. Unfortunately, the group identity and positive evaluations discussed by participants are forged through the disparagement of another woman; rather than the awareness of social and structural prejudice regarding the body.

This is akin to findings by Crocker et al (1991; 1994) in which awareness of prejudice as external to the self was found to be highly protective of self-esteem; and the group with which one identifies will influence one's awareness and response. While Latina and Black women's intellectual awareness regarding the external/structural prejudices in imagery did appear related to their ability to engage in articulate social critiques, this intellectual awareness did not seem to carry into their emotional responses to other women on a day-to-day personal level. Rather, participants in all groups expressed very similar responses through social comparisons with other women. Group membership

seems to shift in relation to context, and when the context is comprised of close friends, the group becomes "smaller": the group is no longer the social group of "woman" as a structurally oppressed group in which all women are included, but breaks into sub-groups which are marked through experiences of the body. The group which is identified with is women, but the identification also entails disengagement from that very group by devaluing a group-member: woman.

Women in all groups discussed the frequency with which women judge and criticize one another. Many participants expressed disdain for this behavior and believed it was destructive and just plain mean. Although all groups perceived these behaviors as something negative which should be stopped, as well as something they did not wish to have directed toward themselves, they also expressed an "unconscious" compulsion to "do it anyway." There seems to be a strong tendency to bond with other women through the de-banding, or derogation, of women as a group. Although these types of comparisons are "voluntary," or not forced by another's comment, there is a sense that simply the presence of other women provokes this response.

Intimidation and Competition

Comparisons, when made in the company of other women, tended to offer a positive emotional response. When made alone, however, comparisons are discussed as engendering highly negative feelings. Comparing with higher-status in-group members has been found to elicit feelings of jealousy, hostility, frustration, and low self-evaluations (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1993); and the participants discussed many of those feelings. Women offered competition and intimidation as main themes in comparisons; and how seeing one beautiful woman could "ruin your whole day." Simply viewing a woman, a stranger on the train, could change one's experience of the self from positive to negative.

Very few participants discussed viewing less attractive others when alone; rather, the majority of discussions equated being among other women friends with comparing down and feeling good. At the same time, the majority of conversations indicated a

relationship between being alone with comparing up and feeling bad. Being with a group seemed to allow women to focus on less attractive women and critique *them*, while being alone seemed to remove this option and focus women's gazes on women perceived as more attractive; the remaining option being the critique of the *self*. It seems that when alone women tend to "see" more beautiful women than when in groups, since comparing upward (through noticing beautiful women) emerged when participants discussed viewing other women when by one's self. When individual identity is salient, personal evaluations and disadvantage are salient as well (Smith & Spears, 1996).

Due to their beauty, these women are then perceived as immediate competition. In addition, the beautiful woman is perceived as forcing the comparison itself (i.e., if she wasn't there, there would be nothing to compare with, and therefore no response). This takes Wood's (1989) theory on forced comparisons to another level. Wood suggests that environments will impose certain comparisons on an individual, and that social comparisons are not just a matter of individual choice; available targets for social comparison are instead limited, or imposed, by one's environment. It seems that participants were aware of the culturally forced-choice of comparing with other women on the physical dimension; but rather than critiquing the environment which limits their relationships with other women, critique other women and themselves. Participants felt the force personally and therefore responded personally.

Three layers of responses can be identified through the information which emerged from the discussions of social comparisons with other women: 1) the intellectual critique of structure, 2) the interpersonal tensions with other women, and 3) the internalization of the standards. The relationships of these layers with one another indicate that the recognition of external social structure may be positively related with personal self-esteem (Crocker et al., 1991; 1994) but not necessarily with relationships to other women.

Latina and Black participants are intellectually aware and articulate regarding social structures and standards, however, the structure itself does define the parameters of

relationships with other women. Interpersonal relationships are then confined, or constrained, by the social standards of physical beauty. At the same time, however, Latina and Black women (Black women in particular) do not seem to have internalized the standards for themselves with regard to their own personal experiences of their bodies. White women's discussions, on the other hand, indicate an absence of social and structural critique, and this absence seems to be related to both their emotional relationships with other women and their psychological relations with the self. White women do not critique structure, yet they do experience interpersonal tensions with other women, and have internalized the standard of beauty for themselves.

The awareness, and critique, of social structures then seems to be related to women's experiences and attitudes towards their own bodies; however, social critique does not seem to be related to women's experiences with one another with regards to social comparisons on the physical dimension. All groups discussed interpersonal tensions with other women, especially with women whom they do not know. Participants in all ethnic/racial groups discussed comparing themselves with other women and all shared similar characterizations of their emotional responses to those comparisons.

The disconnection between critical consciousness and internal, emotional, responses of women is very important. It challenges researchers to go beyond investigation of consciousness per se, to look at the possibilities of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is indeed a step in an important direction, but must be met by an aggressive, action-oriented focus on the social structures which make this consciousness practicable. The shared experiences of interpersonal tensions among women by all ethnic groups in the study, despite varying levels of critical consciousness, must trouble the sense that if only consciousness changes, all else will follow.

Many participants discussed the strong possibility that one is unnecessarily making enemies with someone who could have been a potential friend; and that there is a tendency to "forget" that she is a person who may have feelings and insecurities as well.

Participants were well-aware that these comparisons were creating divisions among women, but expressed the feeling that it is impossible to stop since they "know" that they are also targets for other women. The forced comparisons are thereby embedded in the constructed criterion of the body, and the psychological experiences of these responses are similarly imposed; women then perceive one another within these confines, not seeing each other as people but as the objects they have been forced to become. Other women then become relevant only in regard to their physical appearance, and comparisons become based in competition.

In conjunction with the sense of other women as enemies or competitors, a beautiful woman is perceived as "knowing" she will win the beauty pageant. Not only is she then competition, but she becomes an intimidating presence. The majority of groups discussed being intimidated by beautiful women, and the beautiful woman is then unapproachable. Here, the comparison process becomes more deeply situated: if a woman was to forgo comparing, and attempt to connect with another woman (who may be more beautiful than she), then she may be perceived as conceited, thinking she is better than she really is. Comparison is then simultaneously painful and protective. Its protective qualities are based on the negation of the self. To already admit that one is not beautiful, to be the first to undercut oneself, is to protect oneself from ridicule.

Conceit, Lying and Love

Full circle, the desire for self-acceptance is cut short by the "fact" that a woman cannot be happy with herself without being conceited. When participants were asked how they would respond to a woman who was indeed happy with herself, the majority of groups responded by saying she must be conceited or lying in order to make herself feel better. Not only was there disbelief that a woman could truly be happy with herself, but if there was such a woman then she "got problems."

The possibility of liking the self becomes less and less attainable. To dislike the self was often presented by participants as an indication that one's personal confidence and

character must be developed; and that one should disregard social pressures. To like oneself, however, is unacceptable and an indication that one is conceited. In addition, how could one truly be happy with oneself in the face of all of these social pressures? One must be lying.... These circles and layers of logic indicate ambivalence and discord among the two most often offered solutions for the "body problem": personal confidence and the disregard of social expectations. Personal confidence, although personally desired by participants, is in itself not considered an attainable or acceptable option for women. Personal confidence is difficult to achieve since it is indeed inextricable from social treatment, and if attained will engender negative social response.

The person/social conflict became evident in the discussions of conceit, and often the conversations bounced back and forth between these perceived options. Latina and Black women's discussions were the most likely to reconcile the two and not view them in opposition; however, recognizing the relationships did not seem to be "enough," or to provide any solutions. Rather, participants often found themselves situated in a web of disempowering options and complex relationships, and expressed a sense that there was no real way out. In addition, views on personal and/or social components of body satisfaction, and the conflicts between self-acceptance and conceit, were compounded by the participants expressed desire for love and acceptance.

The main thread which tied these issues together was the expressed motivation to be liked, loved, and accepted. Knowing that a beautiful woman is loved by men and hated by women leaves women in an uncomfortable position; although perhaps slightly more comfortable than being an ugly woman that everyone dislikes. These participants described their perceptions that beauty means love. If women are valued for their bodies, then their bodies are vital tools and can be used to receive love, attention, and sometimes a free drink. The need for love, and the perception of women's bodies as a means to that love, contains and constrains the options available for women to experience the self as well as their relationships with other women. Women are then bound by a focus on the

body, and possible relationships *with* other women transform into comparisons *against* one another.

Where are We?

The social comparison processes described by the participants are disturbing and illuminating. Looking through the meta-lens of social location, one can see a world in which many diverse women are responding to similar imagery and expectations. They share similar perceptions of the gender-themes in the imagery; however, there are many differing responses to these images: analyses and theories, recognition of social issues, the ability to critique and question their presence in dominant culture at all. Findings indicate that ethnic identity seems to be strongly related to the intellectual responses to such imagery; however, emotional responses and tendencies to compare with other women do not seem to be related to ethnicity. In addition, social critique and attention to social structure appears to be positively related to personal body esteem, but is not sufficient to interrupt the types of interpersonal tensions between women in terms of social comparisons on the physical dimension. Critical consciousness does not necessarily translate into collective action among women.

White participants intellectually responded to the dominant-popular imagery through highly individualistic and psychological perspectives; while Latina and Black women were more likely to discuss structure, and actively critique the social environment which constructs images of women. The initial measures of body esteem (stories and notecards), as well as the words that participants used to describe themselves, seem to complement the findings from the discussion; offering information on the relationships among ethnic identity and experience of the body.

Collins (1986) discusses how lived experience generates distinct standpoints, and that common themes will emerge among those who share experiences based on group membership. The structures and thematic content of thought and experience are interlocked: To be treated similarly by one's culture or community will translate into

shared experience; and shared experience will then manifest in specific standpoints. The findings from this research indicate both shared and distinct standpoints among Latina, Black and White women. Participants seem to share experiences on the basis of the social representation and treatment of women's bodies, and respond similarly when confronted with a situation in which they "must" compare themselves with another. The psychological response of social comparison on the physical dimension, however, does not extend into/from the intellectual critiques of the social representations which impose these comparisons.

Collins (1986) also explains that although there may be common themes shared by group members, the expressions of these themes will vary in relation to lived experience. Age, social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on, will interact in distinct forms for each distinct individual. Viewed as a singular group of women, these participants likely share many experiences. They are all students at a specific institution, sharing at least one course in their education. They are all young women, and traditional college-age students. It is very probable that the majority of participants consider themselves to be heterosexual, which may be inferred through their many discussions of guys/men; and they all live in a heterosexist culture. The participants in this study present gender themes which indicate shared experience, as well as diverse themes in relation to ethnicity. There is both variation among the groups and cohesion in their diversity.

Within shared experience participants also offered themes unique in relation to their experiences as members of ethnic groups. White, Latina and Black participants shared general gendered-themes; however, they distinguished themselves through standpoints grounded in their social locations and experiences. White women's standpoints centered on the psychologizing of experience, and mirrored the stereotypical Western ideal of individualism which psychologizing often accompanies (Lykes, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Latina and Black participants tended not only to be far more critical and aware of social structure, but were more likely to discuss issues of the self-in-

relation to family and the collective group (Gaines et al., 1997). In addition, although Latina and Black participants shared similar themes, they were distinctive in their expressions of those themes.

The importance of contextual information for the study of ethnicity requires a contextualization of ethnicity itself. Group identification is meaningful only through history, social location, and the relationship of any group with the dominant culture (Hurtado, 1997; Phinney, 1990). Latinas and Black women may share common experiences with regard to a general relationship with the dominant culture as members of oppressed ethnic groups, but the groups with which they identify are socially identified and defined differently. The ability to articulate structural analyses, ethnic essentialism and misrepresentation, exploitation and discrimination, were shared by Latina and Black women, while the substance and content of their critiques indicates their unique social locations and lived experiences.

Latinas' unique experiences in relation to conflicts of cultures (Davalos, 1996; Hurtado, 1996), class consciousness (Gurin et al., 1994; Hurtado et al., 1994), and stereotypes specific to Latinas alone (Arugelles & Rivero, 1995; Cofer, 1995; Garcia, 1990), illustrate the layers of context which inform the layers of their social experience (diLeonardo, 1991). Similarly, Black women's distinct experiences and stereotypes (Austin, 1997; Carby, 1994; duCille, 1994; 1996) and their distinct layers of identities (Guinier, 1997; Lorde, 1995; Nagel, 1994) uniquely inform Black women's relationships with dominant imagery.

This information is vital for the expansion of body image research and a more complex understanding of how ethnicity is related to dominant-popular imagery. To recognize the specific standpoints of group members, while recognizing the variations within groups (Zavella, 1993), is necessary for a fuller understanding of women's diverse experiences and expressions of the body. In addition, to recognize these standpoints in relation to continuously shifting social structures, and therefore fluid and changing social

identities (Deutsch, 1994; Lykes & Mallona, 1997), is to locate and ground research in the true multiplicity of women's lives. Through the work engaged in with the participants in the focus groups, theories and research regarding the body has been further expanded; and indicates a vast area of work yet to be done. The seemingly stable responses which have been "identified" in previous studies on the body are destabilized and must be reformulated.

The experiences of the body are diverse and meaningful in their distinctions. Women's experiences of their bodies must be re-viewed in relation to the diverse experiences of gender and ethnicity; and must be contextualized through distinct relationships with dominant-popular imagery. Only through these unique standpoints can a clearer view be achieved. The shifts in dominant-popular imagery need to be understood in relation to its many messages and through multiple views, as well as with the understanding that shifting imagery means the transformation of relationships.

In the face of these findings, it seems that the oppositional gaze described by hooks' (1992) may not be easy to hold. Perhaps it is time that the gaze be followed back to the source of its view, before it is too far away to see. When the oppositional gaze is followed back to its view, through its many views, the picture may become clearer. Only through multiple standpoints can work begin to re-create environments in which all women can relate to themselves and one another on empowering dimensions. As long as body image research attends to either/or paradigms -- either the imagery influences women or ethnic identification protects them -- the relationships among multiple identities and experiences will be lost, and women will be lost among them.

Table 1
Frequencies of Story Descriptions by Ethnicity

Ethnicity of Participants								
	<u>Latina</u>		<u>Black</u>		<u>White</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>(n=19)</u>		<u>(n=15)</u>		<u>(n=19)</u>		<u>(N=53)</u>	
<u>Descriptions</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>
Negative	6	(31.58)	4	(26.67)	9	(47.37)	19	(35.85)
Negative to Positive	0		3	(20.00)	5	(26.32)	8	(15.10)
Negative to Neutral	5	(26.32)	1	(6.67)	0		6	(11.32)
Neutral	5	(26.32)	6	(40.00)	3	(15.79)	14	(26.42)
Positive	3	(15.79)	1	(6.67)	2	(10.53)	6	(11.32)
Total	19		15		19		53	

Table 3
Frequencies of Component Themes in Stories by Ethnicity

<u>Component Themes</u>	<u>Ethnicity of Participant</u>							
	<u>Latina</u>		<u>Black</u>		<u>White</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>(n=19)</u>		<u>(n=15)</u>		<u>(n=19)</u>		<u>(N=53)</u>	
	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>
Age	12	(63.16)	8	(53.33)	12	(63.16)	32	(60.38)
Others	15	(78.95)	8	(53.33)	9	(47.37)	32	(60.38)
Weight	10	(52.63)	11	(73.33)	13	(68.42)	34	(64.15)
Total	37		27		34		98	

Table 4

About the Author: Frequencies of Self-Identification Words Shared and Unique by Ethnicity

<u>Shared or Unique</u>										
<u>Word Focus</u>	<u>Shared Words</u>		<u>Unique Words</u>				<u>Total</u>			
	<u>All Groups</u>		<u>Latina</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>		<u>Words</u>			
	<u>(n=113)</u>		<u>(n=36)</u>	<u>(n=32)</u>	<u>(n=48)</u>		<u>(N=229)</u>			
	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>
Inward	61	(53.98)	27 (75.00)	25 (78.13)	28 (58.33)		141	(81.57)		
Outward	31	(27.43)	7 (19.44)	3 (12.00)	8 (16.67)		49	(21.40)		
Body	14	(12.39)	1 (2.78)	3 (12.00)	6 (12.50)		24	(10.48)		
Cultural	7	(6.19)	1 (2.78)	1 (3.13)	6 (12.50)		15	(6.55)		
Total Words Shared: 113										
Total Words Unique: 116										

Table 5
Frequencies of Love/Hate Words by Ethnicity.

<u>Attributions</u>	<u>Ethnicity of Participants</u>							
	<u>Latina</u>		<u>Black</u>		<u>White</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>(n=19)</u>		<u>(n=15)</u>		<u>(n=19)</u>		<u>(N=53)</u>	
	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>%</u>
Love	31	(44.29)	67	(58.26)	47	(47.95)	145	(51.24)
Hate	39	(55.71)	48	(41.74)	51	(52.04)	138	(48.76)
Total	70		115		98		283	

Table 6: Notecards: Frequencies of Shared Love/Hate Words by Ethnicity

<u>Attributions</u>									
<u>LOVE</u>				<u>HATE</u>					
	<u>Latina</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>		<u>Latina</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>		
<u>Words</u>	f	f	f	<u>Words</u>	f	f	f		
eyes	4	9	6	stomach	7	8	3		
hair	2	6	6	breasts	5	4	3		
legs	4	5	4	legs	7	0	2		
breasts	0	5	5	thighs	1	3	4		
lips	2	3	3	butt	2	2	4		
hands	1	3	3	nose	0	2	6		
butt	3	3	0	hips	1	2	4		
nails	0	2	3	feet	1	4	1		
skin	1	2	2	height	1	2	3		
nose	2	1	1	hands	2	1	1		
feet	1	2	0	hair	1	1	2		
arms	1	2	0	lips	2	1	1		
eyebrows	2	1	0	weight	0	2	2		
face	2	1	0	eyes	1	1	1		
				pimples	0	2	1		
Total*	25	48	38		33	36	39		

note: fs <3 not included / Total shared love: n=19, f=111 (fs<3: waist, teeth, figure, hips, stomach)
Total shared hate: n=17, f=108 (fs<3: toes, face) / Total shared: N=36, f=219 / *includes fs<3

Table 7: Notecards: Love/Hate Words Distinctive for Ethnic Groups

<u>Latina</u>	<u>Love</u>	<u>Hate</u>
	myself	size
	tight body	waist
	height	square-figured
	not too big	arms
	looks nice in certain clothes	back
	not too small	
<u>Black</u>	size	stretchmarks
	complexion	back layers
	fingers	cheeks
	toes	shoe size
	shoulders	hairy
	texture	thick
	abs	forehead
	thighs	menstruation
	shape/ty	skin
	smile	shape
	mouth	gut
		fingers
<u>White</u>	thin body	veins on legs
	ears	teeth
	overall proportion	body b/c no shape
	fitness	toenails
	flexibility	fat
	calves	skin color
	neck	chin
	nothing	everything
	no spots	ears
		nails
		paleness
Total distinctive words: N=54 [love n=26, f=35; hate n=28, f=30]		
Total unique for Latina: n=12 [love n=6, f=6; hate n=5, f=6]		
Total unique for Black: n=22 [love n=11, f=19; hate n=12, f=12]		
Total unique for White: n =20 [love n=9, f=9; hate n=11, f=12]		

Figure 1: Maps/Flows of Discussions for Latina, Black, and White Focus Groups.

Latina participants

- grp 1: environment/media/stereotypes/women's looks impt/guys/women criticize/conceit
 why thin=good?/tyra/computerized/nobody's perfect/compare friend/others compare/ comments/sexual harassment
 personality/real/active/hard to change/want real women/weight
- grp2: society/media/computerized/selling/women's roles/lying/conceit/guys/surgery/society/family/women
 criticize/compete/for attention/women criticize/want to change/inequality of women and men/discrimination/
 personality/confidence
 tyra/nobody's perfect/being hispanic/misrepresentation/essentialism/racism/future generations/
 cultural mindset/society
 real/natural
- grp3: media/mags/comparing/family/guys/guys looking/women compete/women criticize/others compare/conceit
 skin/skinny/airbrushed
 everyday ppl/embedded cultural values/mindset/popular girl/women compare/women criticize/
 mags/pom/selling/exploitation/misrepresentation/essentialism

Black participants

- grp 1: weight/media/others comments/stereotypes/"Jamaican"hair/weight/why thin=good?/need love/attention/clothes/
 why fat=bad?/guys looking/women criticize/conceit
 sex sells/using women/tyra/dark model/nobody's perfect/tyra/computerized/pornography/sex sells
 average women/real
- grp2: media/mags/environment/assimilation/need acceptance/love/body=tool/lying/conceit/women compare/
 environment/men-ethnicity prefs/women intimidating/ethnic prefs/discrimination
 modeling/attention/dieting
 real/variation/society/others comments/real women
- grp3: image/mags/models/media/woman as picture/women compare/image=skinny and long straight hair/new dark
 model/essentialism/environment/personality/confidence/others comments/guys/popular girl/confidence/compare
 friend/mags
 skin tones/tyra's breasts/skin tone/fade creams/dark model/skin color
 average/real/identify with/real/beauty=work/hair=work/maintenance

White participants

- grp 1: guys/personality/confidence/guys compare
 stereotypes/models/nobody's perfect/tyra/fat=bad
 everyday ppl/don't identify with/approachable/strong/computerized images/men-ethnic prefs/
 fashion/breasts/fantasy images/depressing
- grp2: models/comparing/others looking/others comments
 computerized/nobody's perfect
 everyday ppl/natural/social expectations/personality/confidence/environment/men-ethnic prefs/
 need love/attention/compare friend/environment/plastic surgery
- grp3: images/others comments/comparing/clothing/media/fat=bad/others comments/fat=bad/others comments/guys/
 personality/confidence/compare up-down/compare friend/mirrors/fat=bad/diets/conceit/fat=bad/unity-for what?/
 fat=bad/ethnic prefs/clothes
 depressing/photos/nobody's perfect/tyra/pretty=better life

Note: 1st indent indicates Notecard Discussion/2nd indicates Images Discussion/3rd indicates after Alternative Boards

Table 8
Frequencies and Means for Topic Shifts in Discussions by Groups.

Focus Group														
	Latina				Black				White				Total*	
	(n=3)				(n=3)				(n=3)				(N=3)	
Discussion	f1	f2	f3	M	f1	f2	f3	M	f1	f2	f3	M	f	M
Notecards	6	21	10	12.33	14	15	18	15.67	4	4	23	10.33	115	38.33
Images	8	9	3	6.67	9	3	6	9.00	5	3	5	4.33	51	17.00
Alternative	6	2	12	6.67	2	4	7	4.33	10	12	0	7.33	55	18.33
Total Disc.	20	32	25	25.67	25	32	31	26.00	19	19	28	22.00	231	77.00
Total	77				88				66					

*Unit of analysis collapsed into 3 main groups: Latina, Black and White.

Key: Notecards=number of topics discussed immediately after reading notecards
 Images=number of topics discussed after images presented to participants
 Alternative=number of topics discussed after alternative board mentioned by participants
 Total=number of topics discussed during each focus group session

General Guidelines for Discussion Excerpts

1. Indentations indicate a new speaker who is speaking "in turn."
2. Interruptions are indicated by a sentence beginning immediately underneath the present speaker.

Example:

A person is speaking and in the middle
someone interrupts

3. When the main speaker resumes, it is indicated by her sentence resuming at the page margin.
4. When a portion of the tape was inaudible, it is indicated in the text by two back-slashes: //
5. When a portion of a discussion in progress is not included, the removed portion is indicated in the text by:

..... Example:

The discussion is in progress

.....
The discussion resumes

Portions were removed when they did not directly, or clearly, inform the topic being presented in the text.

6. When a question by the researcher is part of the discussion, and needs to be included in order to understand the flow of conversation, her presence is marked by: [R:Asks a question].
7. Portions of the conversation which are considered to be highly explicative of the topic being presented are highlighted by the researcher through italics
8. Punctuation is included only when it is explicitly audible in the voice of the speaker. Therefore, even when a sentence grammatically indicated a question, a question mark would not be used unless the speaker made the "sound" associated with a question. The most visible absence of punctuation in the text is the presence of many run-on sentences; since a period would not be used unless there was an explicit stop. Pauses which did not indicate full-stops are indicated with commas; elongated pauses are indicated by 3 dots:...
9. Words are presented as close to their utterance as possible. Slang or personal pronunciations of words are indicated through their spelling. The researcher attempted to allow slang, accents, and so on, to be heard through the visual representations of words by being true to their sounds.

Figure 2

Shared and Unique Words for About the Author: Inner/Character Traits

<p>Black adaptability outspoken hyper loud dramatic leader survivor aggressive perfectionist blunt critical composed mature assertive expressive headstrong lucky</p>	<p>Black & Latina talkative opinionated nervous modest respectable family oriented</p>	<p>Latina open-minded strong-minded simple money-saver religious/not realistic brave have attitude radical brought up well balanced oriented multiple-personality self-conscious pensive/careful impulsive demanding stressed spoiled</p>
	<p>All intelligent (23) good humor (23) hardworking (18) emotional (7)</p>	
	<p>Black & White happy depressive lazy secretive</p>	<p>Latina & White stubborn quiet</p>
	<p>White a dreamer naive skeptic curious deep picky consistent interesting out-of-focus energetic</p>	<p>a-thinker-not-a-doer obsessive-at-times vulnerable hopeful/optimist crazy always thinking romantic/passionate easily amused sarcastic/cynical</p>

Latina n=27; Black n=28, White n=28

Shared n=61 (only highest frequency represented in figure)

Note: stated n's do not match visually represented n's: For clarity in presentation, some words have been "collapsed" with others within groups.

Questions in Pamphlet/Questionnaire

Page 1:

Your Story. Imagine a time when you were very aware of your body, in a positive or negative way. Please write a story about that time. This story may be from your perspective, the perspective of another, or the perspective of your body or body part.

About the Author: Please write a list of 10 words which you think describe you, or are important parts of your personal identity (participants were given 10 numbered spaces in which to write their words).

Page 2:

Responses to Images. Please use this space to write additional comments on the images we looked at. You may use this space to emphasize points made in the discussion, or to state responses which were not discussed with the group.

Questions. Please indicate what other questions you believe to be important regarding women, images, and bodies. For example, what questions would you like to ask other women about these issues?

Page 3:

Comments. Please feel free to use this space for any additional comments or questions you may have regarding this study.

The questionnaire was designed in a folded pamphlet-style.

Image Board A: Stereotypical Imagery/All Groups



Image Board B: Stereotypical Imagery/All Groups



Image Board C: Stereotypical Imagery/All Groups



Image Board D: Stereotypical Imagery/All Groups



Image Board E: Stereotypical Imagery/All Groups



Image Board F: Alternative Imagery/Larger Models



Image Board G: Alternative Imagery/Larger Models



Image Board H: Alternative Imagery/Non-ads



Image Board I: Stereotypical Imagery/Black Women



Image Board J: Stereotypical Imagery/Latina Women



Image Board K: Stereotypical Imagery/White Women



Image Board L: Stereotypical Imagery/Skin tone



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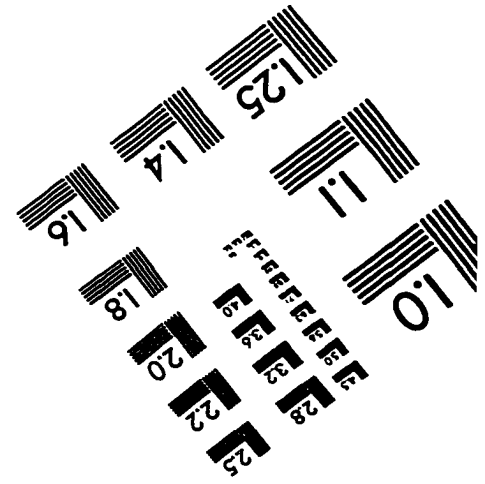
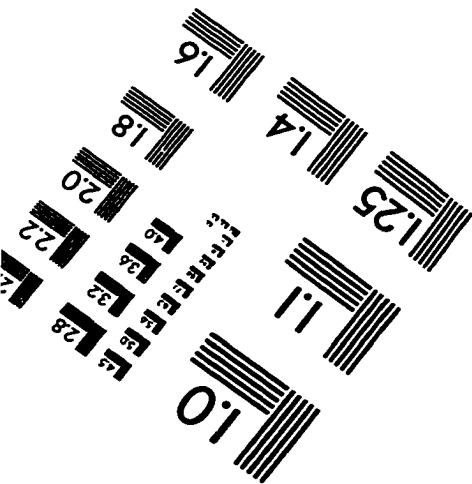
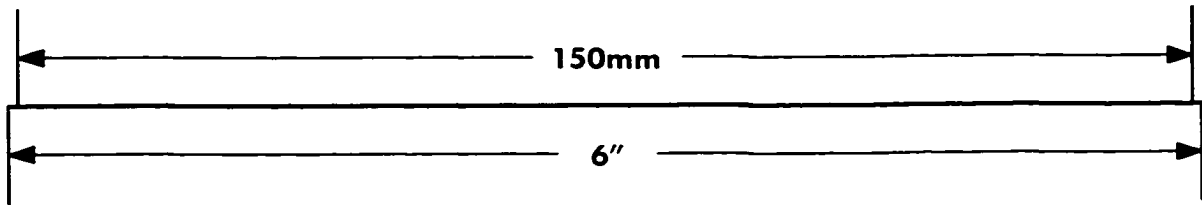
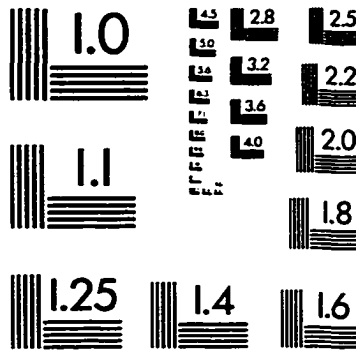
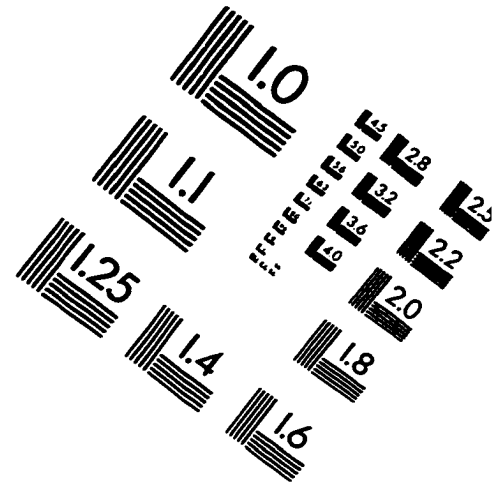
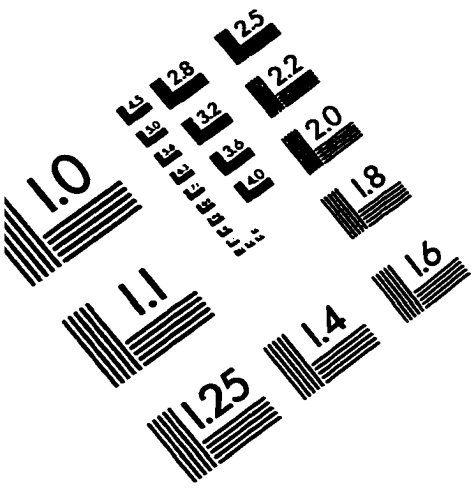
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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