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Body Image:

The Unreal Ideal in Media Representations

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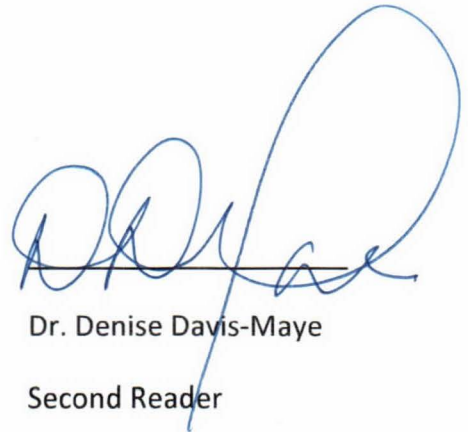
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Body Image: The Unreal Ideal in Media Representations

On a daily basis, women see images presented as those of the ideal woman. Long legs, flat stomachs, voluptuous bottoms, and flowing hair are some of the attributes commonly seen. If magazines are not enough exposure to these traits, there are also music videos, soap operas, and late night infomercials. Not only do these programs show slender images, but they also give multiple ways to achieve them. According to the media's depictions, the perfect woman who many men desire is approximately 5'11 and 120 pounds. However, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average woman stands slightly less than 5'4 and weighs 166.2 pounds (Fryar, Gu, and Ogden 1). Pamela Peeke, a well-known fitness blogger gives similar statistics, "Today, the average American woman is 5'4, has a waist size of 34-35 inches and weighs between 140-150lbs, with a dress size of 12-14. Fifty years ago, the average woman was 5'3-5'4 with a waist size of approximately 24-25", she weighed about 120lbs and wore a size 8" (1). Although sources such as Peeke and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provide the average measurements of women, these are not the images reflected throughout the media. For example, many women in print media, reality shows, and music videos flaunt bodies and body parts that appear to have been medically augmented in some way. Nevertheless, such images are constantly replicated throughout numerous media outlets. Researchers Maggie Wykes and Barrie Gunter write:

Links between television viewing and preferences for thin body shapes have been found among young women, female teenagers and pre-teenage girls. There is evidence, therefore, that while certain slender female icons

in the media are popular with most women, they may be especially well-liked by women who show the greatest concerns about their own body shape. The latter link may be even more pronounced among young women who profess that they do tend to make regular comparisons between themselves and other women in terms of body shape and general appearance. (172)

The perceived ideal body images are quite synonymous across various genres and cultures. Music videos are a place within the media where many adolescent girls are continuously exposed to the perceived ideal body. Because of the replicated images in areas like music videos, young girls socially compare themselves to the supposed ideal bodies which results in body dissatisfaction within the young women.

Music Videos

Music videos are a particular worthy area for studying the idealized body because women have nearly every construct seen in the videos. Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Video Hits One (VH1) are two major television networks that provide similar music video shows. BET has a show called *106th and Park* and VH1 has a show called *VH1+Music*. Both are countdown shows of the week's most popular videos. Although both shows are on different networks, they do share some similarities as well as differences. For example, *106th and Park* provides a mixture of videos with an emphasis on rap and rhythm and blues. On the other hand, *VH1+Music* places emphasis on pop videos with an occasional country or hip hop video entry. In terms of viewing audience, BET has a target demographic of African Americans ages 18-34 and is viewed in more than 98 million homes in the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, and the sub-Saharan Africa (Ad Age 1). VH1 has a target demographic of 18-49 year olds. It also attracts over 4.2 million viewers monthly (medialifemagazine 1).

Before music videos begin filming, producers and directors go in search of women possessing the specific body types they are looking for to place in their video. Usually the requirements fall under what many young women perceive as ideal. For example, Lady Gaga, a popular pop artist, and R. Kelly, a well-known r&b singer, collaborated on a song called "Do What you Want." The producers of the video held a casting call on November 5, 2013 in New York. They were looking for a lead girl, and her ethnicity was not of importance. The women had to be between the ages of 21-28 and very attractive. In addition, they had to possess tons of sex appeal. If a woman was

chosen to be the fortunate lead girl, her wardrobe was considered to be “body conscious.” This meant, she would be wearing very little clothing (projectcasting 1).

Another casting call that involved two very popular rap and r&b singers was the music video for “I’m Out” by Ciara and Nicki Minaj. This casting call was held in New York on May 29, 2013. The producers were looking for eight girls covering all ethnicities. The preferred ages were between 21 and 26. The ad called for “hot girls with fit bodies who are edgy and can bring their own flavor.” The ad also stressed that some girls could be sexy with tattoos and piercings (projectcasting 2). These two examples of casting show that women face beauty standards before the videos are actually made. Producers and directors prematurely set requirements that women must meet in order to be considered for the videos. Not all women make the cuts to get into music videos, so even in this sense, women may find themselves comparing to those who did make it into the videos.

Replication of Media

As previously mentioned, music videos are not the only genre in which viewers can see the perceived ideal body. Because the media creates a preferred image for women, it creates a narrow spectrum that women see often. According to the National Institute on Media and Family, “A 1996 study found that the amount of time an adolescent watches soaps, movies, and music videos is associated with their degree of body dissatisfaction and desire to be thin” (Tiggemann & Pickering 202). Also, “In a study on fifth graders, ten-year-old girls and boys told researchers they were dissatisfied with their own bodies after watching a music video by Britney Spears or a clip from the television show *Friends*” (Mundell 1). Women face the task of developing the appropriate waist-to-hip ratio and overall slimming figure. They often choose unrealistic images to achieve based on the most current and relevant celebrities. When girls watch the newly oversexed Beyonce, the scantily dressed Katy Perry, the curvaceous Nicki Minaj, or the typical video Vixens sporting their bra top or shaking their posterior, they instantly set impractical goals for themselves. Even though a study conducted on a group of ninth grade California girls, reported that there was no clear link between television viewing and importance of appearance, “girls who watched more music videos were slightly but significantly more concerned about weight and appearance” (Borzekowski, Robinson, & Killen 39). Within the media, there is no diversity in body shapes, clothing, or behaviors. Unfortunately, women of all ages view the misrepresentations and then measure their own bodies against the images. As a result, women develop body dissatisfaction.

To further address the effects of images replicated in the media, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey performed a two- year panel study pertaining to sexual objectification within the media, specifically television and magazines. Although her research deals with sexual objectification, some of her results deal with women being exposed to ideal physiques. Because the women observe the constant images, they look at themselves in comparison. Aubrey writes:

A main finding is that exposure to sexually objectifying television shows was associated with an increase in viewers' definitions of their physical selves in terms of externally perceivable traits (i.e., how the body appears) rather than internal traits (i.e., what it can do). One explanation for this process is that exposure to televised objectification cultivates a particular view of the self, a view that emphasizes the importance of physical appearance. (381)

Unfortunately, it is physical appearance that many young women believe makes them desirable. The repeated images heavily influence their views about their own bodies.

In a short essay by Marika Tiggemann, she explains the influences certain outlets in the media have on body image development. Tiggemann writes:

Media surveys indicate that fashion magazines, in particular, are read by the majority of women and girls (estimates up to 83%). Virtually every home has a television set, switched on for an average of 7 hours per day, with individuals each watching 3 or 4 hours. Over a year, children and adolescents spend more time watching television than in any activity other

than sleeping. Such high consumption is likely to affect the consumers in some way. (91)

Tiggemann's thoughts show that viewers are exposed to a substantial amount of perceived idealized images. Her essay draws attention to print as well as television. Nevertheless, she identifies the replication of body image that young girls and women observe daily.

Lastly, Yuanyuan Zhang, Travis L. Dixon, and Kate Conrad conducted a study that dealt with rap videos and ethnic identity. In their article, they write:

Lavine, Sweeney, and Wagner examined the effects of TV commercials that depict women as sex objects on viewer's perception of body image. They found that women who viewed sexist ads, that is, the ads that portray highly attractive female characters with unrealistically thin bodies, preferred a thinner body (indicating a larger discrepancy between their actual body size and their ideal body size) than women who were in the nonexistent or no ad condition. (264)

Even though the images are unrealistic and nearly impossible to attain, women strive to be like the slender models in the advertisements. Furthermore, print media and television possess many areas that constantly expose young girls and women to ideal body image.

Body Image

For decades, adult women and adolescent girls have observed numerous and various portrayals of the perfect woman. A “perfect” woman usually consists of a beautiful actress on television, a model, or a singer, and her body movements. Undoubtedly, such women share the commonality of slender physiques. According to researchers Ruth H. Striegel-Moore and Debra L. Franko, “Body image is a multidimensional concept that encompasses perceptual, attitudinal, and affective components” (183). Striegel-Moore and Franko’s definition of images reflecting the ideal body continuously appears on television screens around the world. The ideal body image is what many adolescent girls and women seek.

Culture and Body Image

My thesis has a special focus on how African-American women are represented in hip hop, rhythm & blues, and pop music videos. I chose two different music shows to exhibit how the same images portrayed on a predominantly African-American show, reflect similar images on a predominantly European American show. Nonetheless, while the viewing audiences may differ in culture, they share some similar views on the portrayed images. Wykes and Gunter reference a 2000 study performed by R. Botta. The study involved fifteen-year-old African-American and European-American adolescent girls and their responses to certain body images. The results stated:

African American girls were found to respond differently from European American girls. Black girls were more satisfied with their bodies and had a larger personal ideal size than did white girls. Black girls, however, engaged in fewer behaviors in a drive to be thin. Further, black and white girls were equally likely to make comparisons with television images while viewing. In both cases, the more they idealized television images, the more dissatisfied they were with their own bodies and the thinner was their personal ideal size. (169)

This is why I chose the two music video shows. Although they are both similarly structured, they attract various viewers. VH+1 attracts majority European Americans while BET attracts a majority of African Americans. Both cultures share body dissatisfaction when exposed to certain media.

Imani Perry is an author who explores the music culture and how it defines gender and various races in terms of representation. She has a profound passion for African-American women and hip hop music and everything hip hop entails such as a woman's identity, self-worth, and perception. She wrote an excerpt titled, "The Venus Hip Hop and the Pink Ghetto." Overall, this piece explains hidden themes and cultural representations of women within the music world. She elaborates on the expectations that women have to meet whether they are the artists themselves or the video girls. To illustrate that varying networks' representations of the ideal body for women are quite similar despite the genres of music or viewing audience, Perry identifies two major networks that air popular music shows and videos:

It seemed to happen suddenly. Every time one turned on BET (Black Entertainment Television) or MTV, one encountered a disturbing music video: Black men rapped surrounded by dozens of black and Latina women dressed in bathing suits, or scantily clad in some other fashion. Video after video proved the same, each one more objectifying than the former. Some took place in strip clubs, some at the pool, at the beach, or in hotel rooms, but the recurrent theme was dozens of half-naked women. (175)

Perry's piece shows that no matter the genre or network, women are constantly portrayed with very little clothing to exploit their beautiful shapes that are seen as ideal for the music industry whether it is a rap video on BET or a pop video on MTV.

In *Black America, Body Beautiful*, Eric Bailey extensively writes about music and body images within various cultures. He writes:

Interestingly, the one major media venue on mainstream American television (MTV, VH1) and black-oriented networks such as Black Entertainment Television (BET) that tended to poorly represent the cultural and physical imagery of African Americans throughout the 1990s and even today are music videos. The music videos contain imagery that reflects and reproduces the institutional context in which they are produced, and they are permeated by stereotypical controlling images of black womanhood. Several stereotypes emerge in the ways black women's videos are programmed, as well in the content of the videos themselves. (90)

Bailey's research goes on to discuss the different images that women are usually categorized under in music videos. He discusses eight different types of women portrayed in music videos, and of the eight, three of the images are generally recognized as having ideal bodies.

Culturally, music videos are a particular worthy area for studying the idealized body because women have nearly every feminine feature observed in music videos. The way a woman walks, the colors she wears, her facial expressions, and the way she styles her hair are indicators of femininity displayed in music videos. Music is deeply rooted in Western culture, and it is important that viewing audiences understand that the shapes and sizes of many women in music videos have been manipulated or cosmetically altered

to some extent. Bailey explains that many of the body types in music videos do not show a variety of body sizes (90). “Videos emphasize black women’s bodies—primarily bodies that would be considered thin by most standards—but not the variety in body size and weight that is typical of African-American women” (90). Because of the focus on the ideal body, psychological limitations prevent a diversified portrayal of women. Therefore, the dominant themes observed in videos promote a narrow image of femininity for women.

Thin images of women are common within the media. Today’s music videos, with special attention to the above mentioned genres, show scenes of how women should strut, act, and, most importantly, look. The women’s features are defined as constructs of femininity. “Femininity, in essence, is a romantic sentiment, a nostalgic tradition of imposed limitations” (Brownmiller 14). Obvious requirements in music videos are body parts such as long legs, full breasts, and flat midriffs. These features portray the perceived ideal representations. The affirmation of cultural ideals for women is what Susan Brownmiller calls femininity. Brownmiller recalls how gender roles were explained when she was a little girl:

As I passed through a stormy adolescence to a stormy maturity, femininity increasingly became exasperation, a brilliant, subtle esthetic that was bafflingly inconsistent at the same time that it was minutely, demandingly concrete, a rigid code of appearance and behavior defined by do’s and don’t do’s that went against my rebellious grain. Femininity was a challenge thrown down to the female sex, a challenge no proud, self-respecting young woman could afford to ignore, particularly one with

enormous ambition that she nursed in secret, alternately feeding or starving its inchoate lie in tremendous confusion. (14)

These social constructions of femininity still exist. The media gives viewers a variety of examples because the audience varies. Women and adolescent girls view such images of femininity, which consist of ideal bodies. They see bodies that are perceived as perfect and desirable. Young women and adolescent girls see videos place emphasis on specific body parts such as hair, flat stomachs, breasts, and legs.

They even witness seductive facial behaviors on most of the women who appear on the videos. Seductive facial behaviors generally consist of the puckering of the lips, the act of blowing kisses, or the strategically placed finger to mouth gesture where the woman seductively motions for the man to come to her. Previous studies show that women conform to the ideal image as a requirement. They feel that meeting this standard increases social and even economic statuses. Susie Orbach writes:

A woman is required to develop or fashion a self-image that others will find attractive. She must observe and evaluate herself, scrutinizing every detail of herself as though she were an outside judge. She attempts to make herself in the image of womanhood presented by billboards, newspapers, magazines, and television. (30)

Women and ideal bodies are prime targets in hip hop and pop music videos. Flashy and exotic bodies and motions grace the television screen for nearly three to four minutes per video. Cameras place special focus on features like curvy posteriors, long hair, flat stomachs, long legs, and voluptuous breasts. “Moreover, the women are often presented

as vacuous, doing nothing in the videos but swaying around seductively. Often, they avert their eyes away from the camera allowing the viewer to have a voyeuristic relationship to them” (Perry 176). In other words, the women are like trophy pieces throughout videos. Their perfect shapes and movements are displayed continuously for a majority of the three to four minutes the video airs on television.

Susan Bordo has a book that talks about how women must cope with the body and femininity. In comparison to Brownmiller, she defines femininity in the following way:

Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity—a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion—female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external obligation, subjection, transformation, improvement. (166)

The transformation and improvement that she refers to is what begins to happen as women observe media forms and see repeated body images. Because media portrays many feminine constructs, women take them as ideal or the proper behaviors and appearance measures they should aim to achieve: “We are no longer given verbal descriptions or exemplars of what a lady is or of what femininity consists. Rather, we learn the rules directly through bodily discourse: through images that tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behavior are required” (Bordo 170).

A woman on a Justin Timberlake pop video is the same when compared to Roscoe Dash’s hip hop video girl because the standards are still the same. Both video

girls must be slim with a touch of curve in all the right places. The curve in specific areas has been culturally accepted as appealing to the male eyes. Women are generally classified as one of five body type categories: the hourglass, square formed, triangular, inverted triangle, or round (robustlife 1). The hourglass and the triangular shape, also known as pear shaped, are the physiques where curves are allowed because the curves are typically in the breast and posterior areas. Most body types portrayed in the media are not realistic standards and below average in measurements. Researchers Johnson, Tobin, and Steinberg write, “The thin-ideal woman often portrayed in the media is typically 15% below the average weight of women, representing an unrealistic standard of thinness (tall, with narrow hips, long legs, and thin thighs)” (67). In a study by Steven Sohn, he writes:

The problem is that many people regard the images portrayed in the media as if they were real, even though such body types are not easily attainable in reality... Thus, the mass media produces unrealistic images of the ideal body shape while sending out a false impression of how real and attainable these body shapes are. As a result, the media affects our own body perception and satisfaction through constant depictions of such ideal body shapes that increase the distance between our actual self-perception and our ideal self. Most existing research on this issue focuses on the media effects on women and teenage girls. (20)

The thin ideal stresses slimness, and youth, rather than the normative female body. Such images are biogenetically difficult for any woman to achieve. Dale Cusumano and J. Kevin Thompson argue, “Sociocultural models emphasize that the current standard of a thin and fit physique is omnipresent and virtually impossible for the average woman to

achieve without excessive dieting and exercise” (719). Bordo writes about how during the Renaissance era and slightly through the Victorian period, the ideal woman was robust. However, the perceived ideal has changed to a slender look and the media is promoting whatever it can for women to use to get the newly accepted ideal figure. Even though many women on the videos appear to have these bodies, many have been cosmetically altered in some way. “Television talk shows feature tales of disasters caused by stomach stapling, gastric bubbles, gastrointestinal bypass operations, liquid diets, compulsive exercising. Magazines warn of the dangers of fat-reduction surgery and liposuction” (Bordo 186). Research shows that many images within the media have not been obtained naturally.

Striegel-Moore and Franko wrote a short essay titled “Body Image Issues among Girls and Women.” In this essay they discuss the different components that affect body image. Striegel-Moore and Franko write:

In the broader cultural context of viewing the body as infinitely malleable, pursuit of thinness has become a social norm for females. Increasingly drastic means of body modification are now presented as ‘normal,’ including the use of cosmetic surgery to remove unwanted body fat. Pursuit of thinness is imbued with the ‘myth of transformation’ : Losing weight holds the promise of changing more than just one’s body size; it promises to change one’s social status, both economically and interpersonally. (187)

In *Unbearable Weight* by Susan Bordo, she gives scholarly explanations on why women want to achieve media portrayed images. More importantly, she goes into detail about why women go through drastic measures in order to get the bodies that audiences constantly see within various forms of the media. Bordo explains:

Popular culture does not apply any brakes to these fantasies of rearrangement and self-transformation. Rather, we are constantly told that we can ‘choose’ our own bodies. The proper diet, the right amount of exercise and you can have, pretty much, anybody you desire. Of course, the rhetoric of choice and self-determination and the breezy analogies comparing cosmetic surgery to fashion accessorizing are deeply mystifying. They efface, not only the inequalities of privilege, money, and time that prohibit most people from indulging in these practices, but the desperation that characterizes the lives of those who do. (247)

Bordo’s thoughts also introduce a factor that plays a role in the unattainable bodies—money. Many adolescents and young women fail to realize that in order for women to have near flawless bodies, they have to endure some hefty expenses at times.

Perry also believes that images and standards set by the media are impossible to achieve for white and black women. Perry writes:

I believe the media plays a role as well. White girls find themselves inundated with images of beauty impossible for most to attain: Sheets of blonde hair, waif-thin bodies, large breasts, no cellulite, small but round features, and high cheekbones. Over the years, black women have

remained relatively absent from public images of beauty, an exclusion which may have saved black girls from aspiring to impossible ideals. But the recent explosion of objectified and highly idealized images of black women in music videos, it is quite possible that the body images and even self-esteem of black girls will begin to drop, particularly as they move into adolescence and their bodies come under scrutiny. (178)

Author Sylvia K. Blood has a similar take on body image as she refers to young white women. In her book *Body Work: The Social Construction of Women's Body Image*, she writes, "Contemporary images of the ideal and desirable future self are embodied in (usually artificially created) representations of women who are white, flawless, thin, and toned. When compared to women's actual bodies—which are never the ideal—these representations can instill a sense of inadequacy in women" (65).

Nevertheless, attaining the preferred body has certain constructs of femininity that are generally emphasized. For example, black women face the construct of curvaceous bottoms. Oftentimes, this body part is one of the main highlights of the video. Perry further writes, "The beauty ideal for black women presented in these videos is as impossible to achieve as the waif-thin models in *Vogue* magazine are for white women" (177). Patricia Collins says that women are objectified in music videos, especially in hip hop and rap videos: "Contemporary music videos of black male artists in particular became increasingly populated with legions of young black women who dance, strut, and serve as visually appealing props for the rapper in question" (128). Collins' take is similar to Brownmiller's femininity definition. Collins further writes:

Not only can the entire body become objectified but also parts of the body can suffer the same fate. For example, music videos for Sir Mix A Lot's 'Baby Got Back,' the film clip for 'Doing Da Butt' from Spike Lee's film *School Daze*, and the music video for 2 Live Crew's 'Pop That Coochie' all focused attention on women's behinds generally, and black women's behinds in particular. (129)

In Sir Mix A Lot's video, he wanders among several booty-swinging women, all of whom are proud to show off their physiques. In Spike Lee's clip in "Doing Da Butt," this party sequence displays booty shaking as a sign of authentic blackness, with the black woman with the biggest bottom being the most authentic. Lastly, 2 Live Crew's video contains a video full of women who simply shake their rumps to entertain members of the music group throughout the entire video. Perry feels that some critics say that such videos are a sign of appreciation for African-American women's bodies. However, she argues, "The image taken as a whole indicates how difficult a beauty ideal this proves to attain for anyone. A small percentage of women, even black women, have such Jessica Rabbit proportions" (177). Sir Mix A Lot and 2 Live Crew's videos are just a couple of examples of music videos in which black women's body parts are the main attraction of the video, but the reasons why are unanswered. More importantly, the aforementioned videos are actually from the early 90s. Similar to Sohn's explanation, Perry writes:

Camera shots linger on very specific types of bodies. The videos have assimilated the African American ideal of a large rotund behind, but the video ideal also features a very small waist, large breasts, and slim shapely legs and arms. Often, while the camera features the faces of lighter-

complexioned women, it will linger on the behinds of darker women, implying the same thing as the early 1990s refrain from Sir Mix-A-Lot's 'Baby Got Back' L.A. face with an Oakland booty. (177)

To illustrate constructs for women that are still evident today, my research shows very similar body objectifications in music videos as current as 2013.

Although the two preceding examples refer to the embodiment of the women's behinds, other features normally receive just as much camera time and zoom in shots. For example, it is not out of the ordinary to watch a music video in which at least 75% of the camera footage focuses on the long flowing hair, long slimming legs, or washboard abs. Brownmiller proclaims:

What seems to be a natural tendency of the female body to acquire substantial, if wobbly, mass runs counter to the preferred ideal of delicate shapeliness. Furthermore, breasts, hips, stomach and thighs, the familiar places where fat cells collect, do not necessarily expand in uniform proportion; genetic differences among women are rife. Yet nearly every civilization has sought to impose a uniform shape upon the female body. In past centuries a woman of status was required to endure some painful device mobilization that shortened her breath or shortened her step by tightly constricting some specific part of her body—waist, abdomen, rib cage, breast, neck, or foot—in belief that she was improving, supporting or enhancing an esthetically imperfect, grossly shapeless natural figure. (33)

She goes on to mention the corset in detail and how for ages men have barely tampered with their bodies to make themselves more appealing to women, but a woman, on the other hand, is expected to depend on tricks and suffering to prove her feminine nature and beauty.

Author Marianne Thesander gives a similar response in terms of women utilizing devices to alter their physical appearance. Her response makes it clear that women did not just begin to encounter perceived ideal body images, nor did they just begin finding ways to cover up their natural flaws. She says that as early as the 1800s, the idealized body for women was a prevalent issue. Certain visual appearances were thought to solidify a woman's femininity. Thesander writes, "The corset was not a new phenomenon: it had in various carnations formed the foundation for dresses for several hundred years. But from the late 1800s there was a radical change in the corset" (81). Because this form of body wear for women was changing, so were the physical ideals. If women wanted to physically see what was considered ideal and acceptable, they could stroll through the nearest store window and see a life-sized woman mannequin with the perfect figure. Thesander elaborates:

The natural female body was concealed; instead, the remolded and idealized body was accentuated as an erotic object. Attention was directed to a specific part of the body, which by virtue of its concealment, became titillating and the object of sexual fantasies. (81)

Although my research does not go into specific details about certain types of clothing this historical information is significant because it shows that as far back as the 1800s, some

of the feminine constructs that exist now, were existent during that time period too. This piece also shows how women managed to manipulate their bodies or garments so their bodies would appear as acceptable. Even the idea of focusing on certain body parts was relevant. Above all, one of the key points is the fact that artificial dummies were used to exemplify the idealized body for a real woman. That in itself is a bit humorous. In other words, society wanted a real woman whose body would naturally change to obtain the image of a structure that could never be physical altered. It would always remain perfect.

Interview with Criscilla Crossland-Anderson

On May 22, 2014, I had the privilege to conduct an email interview with well-known dancer and actress, Criscilla Crossland-Anderson. Crossland-Anderson is known for working in films such as *Accepted*, *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, and *Fat Albert*. In addition to her career as an actress, she is a quite popular dancer in the music video industry. Because of Crossland-Anderson's extensive resume, I thought her input would be very beneficial to my research because she has firsthand experiences that she can share on the topics of body image, music videos, and body dissatisfaction among young girls and women. I emailed Crossland-Anderson four questions and asked her to answer them as freely as she liked. The interview went as follows:

Q1: In Which music videos have you participated?

"I have been in multiple music videos including Britney Spears, Rihanna, Snoop Dogg, Akon, Flo-Rida, Chaka Kahn, Jay-Sean, Kelly Clarkson, and the list goes on. I toured with Snoop, Diddy, Tyrese, Brian Mcknight, and Britney" (Crossland-Anderson).

Q2: This study focuses on adolescent girls and young women watching repeated images of the perceived ideal bodies and how they socially compare themselves to the images. What is your take on this?

"My take on this is what you see is not always real. In music videos, girls are airbrushed with makeup from head to toe. They are made flawless with stylists, hair dressers, and makeup artists. Then in editing the music videos, women are made even more flawless. It's not real. It's a façade, but society and young women watch these videos and think they must look like that to be attractive. It's so sad. It can cause women to have eating

disorders, or want plastic surgery for the wrong reasons. They must learn that tv is fake, all the way around it” (Crossland-Anderson).

Q3: How extreme are the casting call sessions for women and what are some of the reasons women often do not make the cut?

“Casting calls are different. Some of them you stand in front of a camera and say your name. Others, they want to see you dance for a minute or so, and some want you to act out a scene. It all varies. Women can get cut simply because of their height, hair color, skin color, or even availability. They are looking for the perfect match to the artist so that it looks perfect. Height, skin tones, weight from girl to artist comparison. So many factors tie into a casting” (Crossland-Anderson).

Q4: Have you ever done any excessive training, dieting, or cosmetic procedure for a video shoot?

“I have done training and dieting. That’s a part of it. You have a talent or a gift. You must always work to be your best because there is always someone better than you. As far as cosmetic procedure, the most I have done is dye my hair color. Anything permanent isn’t worth it because you may miss out on the next job because you don’t look like the original you” (Crossland-Anderson).

Crossland-Anderson’s interview makes me ponder a little further about certain ideas. First, as a video girl herself, she admitted that everything the audience sees on the videos is false. I find it intriguing that she says casting directors look for the perfect girls to be the perfect matches for videos, but then they are fully airbrushed from head to toe to appear flawless. This means they are not perfect and what casting directors are looking

for are girls who require the least amount of airbrushing or the least amount of video editing. This is what she means by there always being someone better than her.

Crossland-Anderson's interview helps support the notion of the unreal perceived ideal bodies in music videos. She was a perfect interview candidate for my research because my thesis looks at varying genres, and she has worked with an artist from nearly every genre. For the importance of this work, she has worked with artists from hip hop, rhythm and blues, and pop music. Her responses do not indicate that any genre of music is exempt from the images its music videos portray.

Method

To study feminine images such as ideal bodies, my research is viewed from Leon Festinger's social comparison theory. In so many words, social comparison theory states that women look at a video girl who is much like herself and compare her features/assesses to her own (1). Festinger's theory asserts that: (1) individuals have a drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities; (2) in the absence of objective, nonsocial criteria, individuals engage in social comparison (i.e., they compare their opinions and abilities to those of other individuals); and (3) whenever possible, social comparisons are made with similar people (117).

Social comparison is a good theory to use with this research because it does not necessarily focus on specific people; however, it helps to bring attention to various body parts and movements in music videos. Wykes and Gunter mention the need to use social comparison theory:

Under this model, the media can provide sources of influence of body self-image that operate through incidental learning. This kind of learning can produce powerful effects upon media consumers without the need for them to pay special attention to specific role models. In the music video industry, there are certain women who play repeated roles in music videos. (166)

For example, former video girl Lauren London is a popular video vixen in the hip hop culture from just a few years back. She is considered to have the full ideal body. To many viewers she would be classified as the pear-shaped body type for women. She has

just enough curves in the right places. Wykes and Gunter argue that social comparison allows people to diverge from the full image while allowing room to dissect the featured body parts or movements. “The media may nevertheless present a series of images within a stereotypical mold that encourages the occurrence of automatic comparisons between self and role models on the page or screen” (Wykes & Gunter 166).

Further along in Wykes and Gunter’s work, they refer to a study performed by Renee A. Botta in 1999. The study involved adolescent females and the significance of certain forms of mass media content. The young ladies observed certain images from television. Then they were asked to complete a survey that contained questions that focused on the images they watched. In sum, they were asked to choose the images they considered as ideal. Botta explains that young girls look at the images on television programs and define themselves. In other words, they use the repeated images to set a standard for themselves. Because they constantly see the same images from station to station, or show to show, they feel the bodies they see are realistic and easily attainable. In turn, the girls begin to compare themselves, and once they realize they do not meet the comparisons, they feel they will not be socially accepted. En route to achieving what the media portrays as ideal, the young girls take approaches to become thin. The further away they think they are from their goal, the more they dislike their bodies and the more they engage in negative social behaviors (37). Wykes and Gunter state:

Of more importance to body image perceptions than mere exposure to television was the perceived realism of media images and their significance as points of comparison with self or others. Greater realism

attached to television role models, and the tendency to use them as body image yardsticks predicted stronger drive for thinness. (167)

In other words, Botta used the endorsement of the thin bodies and body dissatisfaction as the key measurements. Wykes and Gunter conclude:

Making personal comparisons with televised role models also predicted body dissatisfaction and bulimic tendencies. Overall, the results indicated a television impact on the body image perceptions of adolescent girls that acts through encouragement of comparisons between themselves or their friends and attractive television characters, by encouraging endorsement of thinness as an ideal by presenting thin role models in programmes who are regarded as providing realistic attainment targets. (168)

In addition to Wykes and Gunter, there are other works that support Festinger's argument as it relates to media and its effects. According to author Amanda J. Holmstrom, "Festinger argues that people evaluate themselves through comparison with others and are more likely to compare themselves to those who are similar to them and attractive" (197). It is said that social comparison is supposed to motivate one to improve if one finds a lack in an area. Holmstrom goes on to say, "Researchers who use social comparison theory as a backdrop for media and body image suggest such comparisons could have potential negative effects" (197). In support of this theory, she mentions cultivation theory. Holmstrom explains:

Cultivation theory posits that the more television a person watches, the more that person will believe television life is real life. Those who believe

cultivation theory offers an explanation of the relationship between media and body image, posit that thin images in the media lead people to believe the thin form is both realistic and ideal. Researchers would expect a connection in survey research between length of media exposure and endorsement of the most prevalent body type portrayed by the media, the thin woman. (198)

In reference to my research, Holmstrom's connection between social comparison and the cultivation theory is relevant because my research was gathered over a three month time period. Based on the results, readers can see that exposure to the same unrealistic body never changed. Nevertheless, viewers always watched the same unreal images continuously.

Just like Wykes, Gunter, and Holmstrom, author J. Robyn Goodman supports the argument that media contributes to perceived images and behaviors. Goodman states, "Because the media are the main information source that social processes and self-presentation, women are likely to attend and use media images as guides for their attitudes and behaviors" (713). She goes on to say, "Several researchers have found girls and women idealize thin bodies, cite media models as influences in body satisfaction, and aspire to emulate the ideal" (Goodman 713). Author Catherine Waggoner feels that fashion fetishizes the female body. From the *Journal of Advertising*, Mary Martin and James Gentry speak on how teens compare themselves to the top models in the media. The researchers speak from a social comparison theory. "Using social comparison theory as a framework, we propose that female adolescents compare their physical attractiveness with that of advertising models. As a result, their self-perceptions and self-esteem may

be affected” (20). In other words, when adolescent girls view the women within the media outlets like music videos, they negatively criticize themselves for not meeting the ideal standards portrayed.

Scholars reflect on the history of social comparison theory in *Social Comparison: Contemporary Theory and Research*. They discuss how the theory has evolved based on intellectual demands. In “A Brief History of Social Comparison Theory,” author Ladd Wheeler believes the theory was originated for five reasons. Wheeler explains:

1. This social process arises when the evaluation of opinions or abilities is not feasible by testing directly in the environment. 2. Under such circumstances persons evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparison with others. 3. This comparison leads to pressures toward uniformity. 4. There is a tendency to stop comparing oneself with others who are very divergent. This tendency increases if others are perceived as different from oneself in relevant dimensions. 5. Factors such as importance, relevance and attraction to a group which affect the strength of the original motivation will affect the strength of the pressure towards uniformity. (5)

For my method of research, I conducted a content analysis to examine music videos—representations of femininity. A content analysis was most appropriate for this study because it dealt with the coding of music videos, which is a study of recorded human communication. I did not choose to do an experimental analysis because the

research did not call for actual human participants. It simply required me to sit in the comfort of my own environment, watch, and code videos. I did not have to utilize any type of scales, questionnaires, or surveys because the responses were my results of what the viewers observed. That made the research pertain to the audience's responses. This study was not on how the audience perceived the content but rather the number of appearances of certain indicators within the content. With this, a content analysis provided quantitative data from the videos. During my research, I did not have an actual independent or dependent variable. In other words, there was not one variable that affected the other. My study primarily argues how video imagery promotes feminine images, which promote body dissatisfaction. If this study had examined viewers' responses, there would have been an independent variable, which would be the videos, and the dependent variable would have been the viewers' responses. Since my research did not have a distinct independent variable or dependent variable that was how I arrived at the argument of the media replicating images that young girls negatively compare themselves to results in body dissatisfaction.

I used a cross-sectional study in my research. I used this form of research design because my observations presented a single point in time. I felt this was the most appropriate method because it did not involve collecting data at different points in time. I had the advantage of coding recorded material for the same time each day. In addition, my research was not limited to a specific subpopulation or cohort. Although there are disadvantages to using cross-sectional studies, I believe I have a bigger advantage based upon my conclusions. Typically, the results aim at understanding casual processes that

occur over time and my research shows the feminine portrayals being continuously aired on a daily basis.

My research was conducted during a three hour time frame on two random days between Monday and Thursday. I observed rap, rhythm & blues (r&b), and pop videos. As I watched the specific genres of music videos, I coded for certain body indicators. I used coding of manifest content as my data collecting technique. This was the best technique because in order to determine what was perceived as ideal in music videos, I had to make a count for every time I saw an indicator. The categories I created for body indicators were long hair, flat midriiffs, long legs, voluptuous breasts and voluptuous posterior—a bottom where the camera drew special attention to this area by zooming in on the posterior where the camera moved in the same motion of the bottom. As I watched the recorded videos, I would make a mark under each indicator every time I saw a woman with one of the indicators.

The two major networks I gathered my research from were VH1 and BET. The two specific shows were *Vh+1 Music* and *106th and Park*. I picked these two particular networks and their shows because they both aired programs that centered on countdowns of the most popular videos of the day. The second reason was because *VH1+Music* gave viewers a mixture of videos with a high emphasis on pop. On the other hand, *106th and Park* provided a mixture of videos with a higher emphasis on rap and rhythm and blues. I believe both shows were necessary for the research to show that even among different genres of music videos, the same representations of unrealistic female body images were synonymous.

I used a convenient sample in my research to find videos to code. A convenient sample was best for my research because the items observed did not call for the availability of participants. On one day, I watched *106th and Park* from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. The following day, I watched *VHI+Music* from 6:00 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. I chose to code *106th and Park* at this time because for the first full hour, videos are shown continuously without interruptions. I attached the additional thirty minutes so I could get the last two or three videos for the day. Generally the second half of the show consisted of a lot of guest appearances and host/audience interaction. I coded *VHI+Music* at the specified time because this was the opening of the program, which usually showed what was considered as the oldest videos first. In addition, it was an hour of nonstop coverage. Both shows shared the commonality of the genres of music being the complete opposite of those shown during the beginning of the show. Lastly, there were time differences because one show airs early in the morning while the other program aired in the late evening. I also chose to add the additional thirty minutes of each show because both shows often showed snippets of videos. A snippet of a video does not show the video in its entirety. Instead, only a brief twenty to thirty seconds was shown. I intentionally did not choose Friday's show. Fridays were excluded because *106th and Park* was structured differently on that day. Generally on Fridays, various guests were allowed to come on and exhibit their lyrical talents through a competition which lasted for the majority of the show. Nevertheless, very few videos were shown, which demonstrated an imbalance in comparison to *VHI+Music*.

Results

I coded twenty videos for my research. Ten videos were from *106th and Park* and the other ten were from *Vh1+Music*. I coded for the indicators long hair, posterior, midriff, long legs, and voluptuous breasts. Out of twenty videos, I tallied 155 marks for women with long hair. For the posterior category, I tallied 96 marks for whenever the camera specially zoomed in on the woman's posterior. For images of midriffs, I tallied 93 marks. Long legs were a total of 83 marks. Voluptuous breasts had a total of 77 marks.

Data Analysis

My results from a total of twenty coded videos reflect numbers that can create great conversation among researchers. For example, before I even began to code, I had already developed my own prediction of the results. I thought the most displayed indicator would be the posterior, and voluptuous breasts would be the runner up, especially in terms of hip hop and rhythm and blues videos. However, I was wrong. The indicator that was documented the most was long hair. In nearly every video I coded from BET and VH1, the women characters had long, flowing tresses. It did not matter if the hair was wavy, curly, or straight. As long as the hair was at least 26-28 inches minimum was all that appeared to matter. There was an occasional video girl with short or pixie cut hair, but generally the camera focused on some other feature such as her plunging neck line or glossy, long legs.

One major distinction I saw between *VH1+Music* and *106th and Park* were the common themes of the videos. Although this did not have a direct place in my research, it did lead me to ponder some questions about how wardrobe is chosen for the characters in the videos. For example, because *106th and Park* focuses on the genres of hip hop and rhythm and blues, the general themes include partying, making money, relationship troubles, hard knock lives, and life's struggles. It is typical to have a video that focuses on partying. It is not out of the ordinary to see a video with this theme in a club setting with lots of men and women drinking and having fun. Generally the women are dressed in the shortest dresses or the most revealing shirt the stylist could find. This is generally where the audience sees the perceived ideal bodies. None of this is unexpected.

VH1+Music spotlights a lot of pop culture music. Many of the themes I saw in videos dealt with finding a love, having fun, exploring the world, discovering self-identity, and getting in touch with inner feelings. The very first video I closely coded is the one that made me begin to ask questions. I coded “Ain’t It Fun” by Paramore. Paramore is a musical group that falls under the genre of pop rock. This group consists of two men and one woman. The video is very animated, and it shows the group on their journey to set multiple world records. For example, the group set a record for the most cartwheels in twenty seconds while wearing boots and breaking the most records in a single music video. This video is very fast paced because the group has a mission to set these ridiculous records in a set time. Since the theme is established, one would think the characters would be dressed fairly casual and comfortable. Nevertheless, the two men in this video are casually and considerably comfortable. On the other hand, the female member always wears a cropped shirt that exposes her flat midriff section. In the opening scene, the group is on top of a bridge smashing guitars. While the two guys are fully covered, the female member has a nice white blazer with a blue bra top. By scene two, the blazer comes off and the audience now sees a fairly slim and toned body. Throughout the final scene, the audience repeatedly sees this nicely toned woman working to achieve some of the craziest records. This was not one of the most extreme videos I coded. However, I chose this example because once I watched the video; I questioned the appropriateness of the woman’s attire for such a high intense and active video. This example shows how a pop video that is not centered on sexual objectification or common themes seen in the hip hop culture, still manages to present a perceived ideal body.

Another video from *VHI+Music* that caught my attention was “G.U.Y (Girl Under You)” by Lady Gaga. This video and even its lyrics left me feeling a bit awkward after watching it. Gaga considers herself as a new age feminist. Lady Gaga’s views differ from how many feminists feel about submissive women. She feels that she finds strength in being submissive to men. She definitely displays this thought in her video. This video is very sexual and there are breasts, midriffs, and voluptuous bottoms everywhere!

Lady Gaga is clearly the protagonist in this video. I witnessed all indicators multiple times. In the opening scene, Gaga is in a large-sized white room with multiple men and women dancers dressed in white. The audience instantly knows that the scantily dressed Gaga is the primary focus of the video because she is in a white two piece swimsuit dancing on a white pedestal in the center of the dancers. There are at least thirty to forty dancers in this scene, and they surround Gaga as they perform. All the women in this scene have some form of midriff action going with their wardrobe. Some women simply have on a bikini top, while others have on halters that stop right above the navel. This video alternates between three or four scenes. One scene that gives the audience an eyeful is a part where Gaga is positioned on the floor with very minimal clothing. She has no shirt on, but she is lying on a blue scarf that is strategically placed to cover certain body parts. She also has on sheer white fishnet pantyhose that leaves very little to the imagination. Her most plentiful feature in this scene is her extremely long white hair that perfectly aligns her curves all the past the back side of her legs.

In a scene towards the end of the video, Gaga is dressed in a black swimsuit that has cut outs on the sides and midriff area. It also has a deep V-neck cut that allows her breasts to sit up and out from at least two angles. In this scene, Gaga is the only woman

in the video, but she is surrounded by men who have very fit and toned bodies. The only pieces of clothing the men have on are their pants. Gaga, once again, is the center of attention for this part of the video because she sits in the middle of a pool on a floating device, and as she sits there, ironically the men are catering to her by touching certain body parts and seductively feeding her strawberries.

This video is a great illustration of what many young women and adolescent girls perceive as acceptable. Although Gaga considers herself as a new age feminist, she has men groping her body parts and in turn she is being rewarded with a tasty treat at the end. This example supports the idea that many girls believe that they must attain certain body images in order to be socially accepted by their peers.

Another video that caught my attention was “Pay My Bills” by Destiny’s Child. This video was *VH1+Music*’s throwback video for the day. Both shows I coded have a segment during their show when they go back a few years and play a video that was really popular when it was first released. “Pay My Bills” was the video for the day, and I was able to make a few observations about the portrayal of the female characters throughout the video. In addition, I marked numerous repeated indicators.

The setting of this video is in a beauty salon, and the group members of Destiny’s Child are the hairstylists. The stylists have a client in their chair, and as the stylists are singing, they are acting as if it is a conversation between them and their client. In an ordinary beauty salon that one may find in a town or city, stylists generally have on comfortable flats and oversized smocks to protect their clothing. Not these stylists. Beyoncé Knowles, leader of the female group, has on a short, pastel pink dress, a

spaghetti strapped halter fitting shirt, long luxurious hair, and a stiletto heel with at least a five inch heel. Kelly Rowland, another member, has on long pants, but not ordinary long pants. She is known for her long, sexy legs, and sculpted midsection. Instead of completely covering her legs, her pants have crisscross cut outs going down each side of her pant legs. In addition, the halter she wears appears to be a full shirt, but it is not. The shirt has huge cut outs across the entire midsection to show her toned midsection. Another member has on a short skirt and a half corset type shirt with a V-neck cut to accentuate her voluptuous breasts. Her heels are at least four to five inches, and they have straps that reach midway on her legs.

It is not enough that these hairstylists are minimally dressed. Even the clients in the beauty salon are not plainly dressed. Many of the women have on some **type** of form fitting dress, and they are always shown sitting with their legs crossed, so the audience can see their long and glossy legs. There is even a part where the camera specifically shows about four or five women sitting in chairs. The camera shows only their legs as the women do a synchronized crossing of the legs. Out of all moments in this video, this one quick segment displayed how certain body parts receive a lot of attention in videos. The audience never sees a face or even body attached to the women, just a mere feature.

In comparison to videos shown on *VH1+Music*, a few videos from *106th and Park* displayed similar images, just covering different genres of music. I coded a video for the rhythm and blues artist Sevyn Streeter. Streeter is a young artist that started in the music industry for writing music for other popular artists like Chris Brown, Brandy, and Kelly Rowland. The video I coded was for a song called "I Like It." The song is about her on and off again relationship with her boyfriend. She sings about how one day everything is

going great in their relationship and the next day everything crumbles. It is a classic theme for a young 27-year-old rhythm and blues singer.

Streeter is the protagonist in this video. In her opening scene, she has four female dancers behind her. Streeter has on some oversized pants, but to offset the largeness of her pants, she wears a sports bra-type shirt that allows the audience to see her toned midsection. Instantly, I noticed that three of the dancers have on shirts that reveal their flat midsection. However, the dancer who appears slightly bigger than the other dancers by maybe five or ten pounds does not have on a shirt that reveals her stomach. Instead, she has on a whole shirt that has sheer mesh to complement her breasts. This is an example of how if one area of a body does not meet certain standards, other body parts are manipulated and our focus is drawn to that area, causing the audience to veer away from the alleged flaw.

For the entire video, only one man appears. It is assumed that this is her on-and-off again boyfriend. When he does appear, he is fully dressed in a black jacket, shirt, and pants. However, Streeter has on a short skirt, black mesh tights, and a half shirt that once again shows her toned midsection. During this scene, Streeter is seductively dancing around her guy, and every time he attempts to touch her body, she pushes him away. Therefore, she controls every move he makes. During the entire scene, the male character cannot keep his eyes off of Streeter's body. This is why he constantly attempts to touch her as she dances around him. He never gazes at Streeter face to face, and when he does attempt to touch her, she moves out of his sight. Streeter is clearly dressed in a seductive manner, and she exposes her flawless body, which draws great attention from her guy and the viewers.

I also coded the video “Show Out” by rapper Juicy J. This video is the typical rap video that has a theme of money and partying. The opening lyrics of this song instantaneously set the tone and theme for this video: “Every time I go out, you know I gotta show out. Every time I go out, you know I bring that dough out. Every time I go out, you know they bring they hoe out.” The audience knows the artist has lots of money, and it is very likely the video girls may be labeled as video hoes.

This video alternates between two settings. One is on a plane and another is in a club. Unlike the previous video examples, Juicy J is the protagonist in this video and all of the gorgeous women flock to him. The video has a clear imbalanced men-to-women ratio. However, the party continues. The plane scene shows the audience a beautiful pilot with long black hair, a fitted pilot’s suit, and heels. Amongst the gorgeous pilot, there are beautiful women everywhere surrounding Juicy J as he raps. The two main indicators in this video was hair and breasts. As the women sit on the plane and dance in their seats, they twirl their hair and seductively sway their bodies. The women standing around Juicy J dance around him in a very sexual manner. The same goes for the club setting. Juicy J is the center of attention, while the women are parading around him in their form fitting and revealing outfits. Unfortunately, they show a correlation with his lyrics.

Perry writes about how music videos tend to demonstrate a quite exotic setting for women. Instead of the audience seeing a woman’s true beauty, they usually get an X-rated impression. She said the theme is sometimes pornographic. Perry gives examples seen in the *Howard Stern Show*, *E! Entertainment Television*, and daytime talk shows” (176). She expounds:

While music videos are male-centered in that they assume a heterosexual male viewer who will appreciate the images of sexually available young women, it is clear that young women watch as well. The messages such videos send to young women are instructions on how to be sexy and how to look in order to capture the attention of men with wealth and charisma. Magazines geared towards young women have given instructions on how women should participate in their own objectification for decades, but never before has a genre completely centralized black women in this process. (176)

“Show Out” is a video that clearly reflects Perry’s idea. The women in this video are beautiful. However, their enormous presence and manner can make the audience question their relevance in the video. All the audience sees is a bunch of women constantly waving their hands in the air, grinding around the one or two male characters in the video, or running their fingers through their long hair.

Hair is one of the most replicated indicators I marked for this video. There are two scenes where the characters’ hair serves as props for that particular segment. For example, there is a scene where Streeter is lying horizontally on a black and white patchwork floor. The camera is angled where the audience is looking down at Streeter. As Streeter is lying on the floor, she has on this form fitting black and white one piece suit. The way her head is positioned, her hair is spread out. It almost puts a person in the mind of a peacock’s tail. As she lays on the floor and sing, she is running her fingers through her hair, or she is twirling strands around her finger.

Long hair appears as a prop during the final dance scene in the video. In the course of this part, the dancers utilize chairs to seductively dance in many different ways. As they are dancing, most moves are those where they are constantly swinging and throwing their hair in every direction. If they are not swinging their hair, they are running their fingers through it. This is the last impression with which the video leaves the audience.

I did not expect hair to be as important as the numbers show, but women's hair did receive a lot of camera action. Hair is a major construct seen in numerous music videos. Whether it consists of extensions, curly curls, bone straight, or wet and wavy, it will almost always be long and full of movement and what critics consider "good hair." Brownmiller writes, "I harbor a deep desire to wear my hair long because, like all the women I know, I grew up believing that long hair is irrefutably feminine" (55). In relation to the movement of the hair, women are normally seen running their fingers through their hair, or they start with a pin-up style and then seductively let it down so that it flows or moves in the wind. A great example appears in the video "I Like It." Brownmiller's justification for such movements is, "A woman's act of unpinning and letting down a cascade of long hair is interpreted as a highly erotic gesture, a release of inhibiting restraints, a sign of sexual readiness which may be an enticement or a snare, a frightening danger or, in some cases, a possible salvation" (60). Nonetheless, people must remember that just because hair appears long, that does not mean it is appealing because there is a factor known as "good hair" and "bad hair," and these video bombshells do indeed possess the best quality hair. "Good hair is silken and soft to the touch, it is full pliant and yielding, the feminine ideal in matters of anatomy as well as in

character and personality. And bad hair—do we define that? ‘Bad’ hair is split and broken ends, hair that is limp and stringy, hair that is wiry and unmanageable or too thin to hold a set, hair that is too coarse to the touch of fingers, hair that is naturally wild and kinky” (Brownmiller 60). With this being said, it is no doubt that the gesture of long, layered hair has an erotic value within music videos.

Even though hair was the most recorded indicator, the other categories were not far behind. Voluptuous breasts appeared in many of the videos. It was not very hard to draw the audience’s attention to the dancers’ breasts because usually they were accentuated with a shirt with a very low cleavage or a shirt that was sweetheart shaped and allowed the breasts to sit firm and upright. For example, in Gaga’s “G.U.Y” video, all of her swimsuits have a very revealing dip or V-neck. If the front view was not enough, she often turned to the side to show the camera how her breasts slightly protruded from the sides of the swimsuit. There has been past research done specifically on the media and its effects on ideal breasts image. For example, J. R. Goodman and Kim Walsh-Childers conducted focus group interviews on some college women. The research studied how women interpret the display of disproportionately large breasted women within the media. There were three focus groups of twenty-eight female participants. They were asked a range of questions that dealt with what they thought was the ideal breast size in the media. They were also asked what they considered to be their ideal breast size and appearance for themselves. Goodman and Walsh-Childers’ results state:

When asked what their own ideal breast and body size was, most everyone said the ideal body was toned and flabless with ‘perky, cleavagy’ breasts in proportion to their height and weight. Although the women said they

wanted their breasts to be in proportion to their bodies, their body ideal did seem to match the media's 36-24-36 ideal (i.e., thin body with disproportionately large breasts). (661)

These same groups of girls even referred to Britney Spears and Victoria's Secret models. They felt these were the type of women who were ideal in the media. In their eyes, these women possessed the 36-24-36 body ratio. This is the ratio with which it is ideal and acceptable for certain body parts to be fuller. They considered anything over this ratio to be full-figured. Besides the ideal body ratio, this study reveals:

These women consistently said they desired perky breasts and cleavage. Many researchers have noted that the media idealize only one type of breast—firm, uplifted breasts with 'plunging cleavage.' Because this is the predominant breast type with which women are presented in the media, women do not often see the varieties of breast types that occur naturally and, therefore, may have a greater desire to attain the ideal. (661)

Goodman and Walsh-Childers make a decent point when they mention the lack of a variety of breast types. It is not just a lack of variety of certain body parts, but body types as a whole. The media displays the same body types over and over again. This reinforcement is why adolescent girls and young women believe that the images on television are what they should look like. Not every woman believes that the images are realistic or even ideal, however, for the viewing audiences of shows like *VH1+Music* and *106th and Park* believe that the constant images are the epitome of perfection.

Emphasis on specific body parts is given enormous amounts of attention, sending viewers the message of what is deemed as acceptable. Oftentimes, hip hop and pop videos fail to embrace beautiful women with short hair, full-figures and average height. The camera normally crops at the neck and shows from the chest down, unless they have really nice legs or a rotund posterior. Full-figured women do not stand a chance unless they serve as the comic relief for the video. Furthermore, adolescent girls and young women are restricted to watching the repeated images of ideal in the media whether it is in film, magazines, or music videos. In addition, there were times during my coding of the *VHI+Music* videos where I found myself sitting through an entire video and mark very little. This had a lot to do with the genre of music and I believe the age of the artist. For instance, if it was a young pop group, you did not see breasts bulging and bottoms shaking. Instead, they video was about an innocent love or search for love and the only indicator I saw was long hair. However, *VHI+Music* would make sure for every innocent video; at least two would follow with many of the indicators. *106th and Park* allowed me to make continuous marks through nearly 90% of the videos.

One element I observed about videos in which women served as the protagonist was the idea that any sexual objectification of their bodies happened on their terms. They were always the one in charge. In “G.U.Y.,” Gaga was the protagonist, and she was the one being catered to by nice muscular men with as little clothing as possible. In “I Like It,” the only male present was the alleged boyfriend, and Streeter only allowed him to do what she wanted him to do. According to Rana A. Emerson, this is seen a lot with female artists and it is considered as “reversal and returning of the gaze” (130). Emerson writes:

A critical mass of videos features men as objects of women's desire, where men's bodies are the center of the camera's gaze. What also occurs in these videos is a reversing of traditional gender roles in which men are objectified. Simultaneously, women remain the object of the roles in which men are objectified. Many videos share the commonality of the construction of the male body, as the object of female pleasure. The male body is not merely looked at; rather, it is actively pursued. These women clearly and unequivocally express what they want, how they want it, and that they frequently get it. (131)

Conclusion

The results indicate that there are a limited amount of body types represented in music videos. Although the perceived ideal body is replicated in many genres, this research shows the specific area of music videos. Because of the lack of diversity, women are limited to the images on the videos. The media gives viewers pictures that are appealing to the eyes. For music videos, it is usually sexually appealing. That is why there are indicators that deal explicitly with body parts covered with little amounts of clothing.

Even though a content analysis was most appropriate for this study, there are limitations and ethical issues present. For example, content analysis was useful in this research because patterns were discovered as it relates to media content; however, the project only provides insight on the portrayals, but never focuses on how the audience actually uses this information. How viewers utilize the results is critical in determining if women really do view the bodies as ideal because that is all that is represented.

In addition to advantages of a content analysis, a content analysis is very feasible as it pertains to money and time. There were no surveys, large research staffs, or special equipment. I only used pen, paper, my television, and my personal DVR recorder. As long as I had access to the materials being coded, I could complete my content analysis. The content analysis also allowed for the error corrections.

This research imposes further limitations. BET and VH1 are the only networks examined. Videos from Country Music Television (CMT) and Music Television Jams (MTV Jams) are excluded. As long as these stations play videos, portrayals of the ideal

because the event under study could no longer exist. Nevertheless, in a content analysis, it is usually easier to repeat a portion of the study than it is in other research methods.

This research imposes further limitations. BET and VH1 are the only networks examined. Videos from Country Music Television (CMT) and Music Television Jams (MTV Jams) are excluded. As long as these stations play videos, portrayals of the ideal bodies are present. These two stations are actually sister stations run under the same company. MTV plays a lot of pop and rock music, very similar to VH1. CMT is 100% country music. Both shows have a music video countdown that they air every day. MTV is similar to VH1 with the types of videos it airs. MTV shows a variety of genres; however, a majority of the videos fall under pop. Occasionally viewers will see a hip hop or rock video. If a content analysis were conducted on these two networks, a wider genre of videos and images would be visible.

Other limitations include the fact that a content analysis is limited to the examination of recorded communication. Problems of validity occur, while materials studied strengthen the likelihood of reliability. For example, a researcher can sit and watch the same ten videos at two different times. While the results may be within range of each other, an indicator that is documented the first time, may not be seen the second time. Generally, if our minds are already set for what we are about to see, we tend to zoom on another feature we may have overlooked the initial time. Because of this possibility, coding and recoding can continuously occur in order to make certain that coding is consistent. Instead of coding and recording in one sitting, a researcher could code the same set of videos a few additional times to see if there is any significant change. Also, what I may consider as voluptuous breasts or long hair may not be the

Although the results are powerful, there is so much more that can be done with this research. Since media is so broad and constantly changing, using actual participants would help tremendously because instead of simply coding videos and providing results, participants can take those same results and reveal what the numbers and images mean to them. Such information will help researchers further understand how certain personal connections are made with repeated ideal body images. Further observation will show if and how the media shapes adolescent and young women's ideas about their bodies or even their roles as women.

The email interview with Crossland-Anderson illuminated a few indicators about which I was previously unaware. She mentioned that women can be cut during casting calls based on height, hair color, and skin color. Once I thought about it, I realized that the researcher can go so much deeper by simply adding those categories as indicators. Skin color alone can create significant findings. For example, it is rare to see a dark-skinned woman in a music video, and if one does appear, she is in the minority, and she only appears only for a second. Most of the time their presence is less than 10%. Skin color is almost equivalent to not having the right body proportions. Music videos tend to make darker-skinned women appear as not socially acceptable even on networks such as BET.

I did not go into detail about hair color. I concentrated solely on the length. Crossland-Anderson's response allowed me to briefly think back to certain music videos, and from what I can recollect, women with dark hair were a plus and they were always in the majority. Blondes and redheads were present; however, brunettes seemed to be the

I did not go into detail about hair color. I concentrated solely on the length. Crossland-Anderson's response allowed me to briefly think back to certain music videos, and from what I can recollect, women with dark hair were a plus and they were always in the majority. Blondes and redheads were present; however, brunettes seemed to be the favorite. Even Crossland-Anderson admitted that she changed her hair color in order to make a casting call.

With so many adolescent girls and young women drawn to social media forms, work on social outlets such as Facebook and Instagram can create great discourse. It is often said that many people live the lives they wish they had through social networking. These are two of the most popular networks where people are constantly posting selfies and weekend getaway pictures. It is rare when people choose to post their frumpiest picture of the day on the networks. Time and time again, Facebook and Instagram users post their most flawless pics. Even now, it is not unusual for a person's Facebook page to be filled with weight loss advertisements on how to burn belly fat naturally or how to lose 10 pounds in ten days. Next to the ad is usually the model holding the latest weight loss supplement as she sports her flat abs, toned arms, toned legs, and perfectly shaped posterior.

There is more work to be done with the media and its effects on women. There are various areas that can be thoroughly explored. Whether it is print media, television series, or music videos, they all share common themes of the ideal bodies for women. Although body image varies across cultures, many women within American culture feel compelled to obtain what they perceived to be ideal.

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