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# African American/Latina High School Girls' Preoccupation with Concepts of Personal Beauty: The Impact on Self-Worth and Academic Performance

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African American/Latina High School Girls' Preoccupation with Concepts of Personal Beauty:

The Impact on Self-Worth and Academic Performance

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**Signature Sheet**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine African American and Latina high school girls' understanding of how their self-worth and academic performance may be impacted by the amount of time used to achieve a desired physical appearance. This descriptive, qualitative study used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology. The researcher conducted discussions with 11 African American and Hispanic American high school girls between the ages of 14-17, enrolled in grades 9-12.  Results concluded that a majority of participants believed physical beauty was the most important quality in having a successful life and spent a significant amount of time applying and/or reapplying make-up before, during, and throughout the school day. Participants associated the concept of "ideal" beauty with a Western beauty ideal, and with celebrities. Participants equated physical beauty with success.  Lastly, the study concluded that participants spend more time on media devices than on academic work.

Keywords:  body image, self-worth, secondary school, academic performance, girls/young women, media influence

**Chapter 1 Introduction**

How is beauty determined?  How is it measured?  According to Susie Orbach, a British psychotherapist featured in film-maker, Elena Rossini documentary, *The Illusionist*, ". . .we're losing bodies as fast as we're losing languages. Just as English has become the lingua Franca of the world, so the white, *blondified*, small nosed, pert-breasted, long legged body is coming to stand in for the great variety of human bodies that there are.  Western beauty ideals -actually man-made Western beauty ideals - have spread to the rest of the world through globalization and are now being upheld as models, even in places like India and Japan. And they have very dangerous consequences (Rossini, 2015).

Advertised images of women and young girls with "perfect" bodies send the message that physical appearance is what is most valued in females in our society.  At the same time, young men are also viewing those images and receive the same message- that the value of females is based on physical appearance (Newsome, 2011).  These images are largely based on Western ideals of beauty as being white, youthful, and slender (Mckay, 2014).  The racial make-up in the United States is rapidly changing, however.  Although 61.6% of the country is White, African Americans, Hispanic, Asian, and Multi-racial groups comprise 39.1% of the total.  In California, 38% of the population is White and 49.1% is African American, Hispanic, Asian, or Mixed-Race.

As a result of changing demographics, It is likely that current ideals of beauty may become more inclusive the future.  In the meantime, however, millions of women will continue to strive to achieve a Western ideal of beauty.

Media advertisements for beauty products have become increasingly aggressive over the years, with the youth population being a large targeted audience.  Ads and commercials

advertising products are designed to not only improve looks, but also suggest the possibility of increased social comfort and acceptance.  Through increased access to social media, advertisement of beauty products has made its way into the homes and classrooms of impressionable young women.  With this technology so readily available via cell phones, tablets, and even wrist watches, students are able to access streaming advertising sites that offer instant tutorials, such as how to make your skin lighter and smoother, how to make your hair straighter, how to contour your cheekbones and nose.  These tutorials offer support for the Western ideals associated with beauty and reduces diverse beauty options. The use of these tutorials has continued to increase, however.  Recently, a British newspaper, The Daily Mail, reported that beauty videos reached 700 million "hits" a month (London, 2014).

According to demographic data of female-dominated YouTube categories, the category entitled "makeup and cosmetics" was seen by approximately 56% of all viewers between the ages of 13-24 (Statista, April 24, 2015).  Girls who have been made to see their natural looks as imperfections are especially vulnerable to these sites.  When presented with these images girls may feel pressured to conform, and become willing to spend additional time in order to achieve this unrealistic perfection.

Many of these sites are used and shared by young girls of diverse ethnicities within schools and during school hours and class time.   These students are willing to spend this additional time in an attempt to achieve a Western ideal of physical perfection and beauty. Applying makeup is no longer limited to the morning hour before leaving the house, but throughout the day.  In an attempt to maintain the "look," young girls reapply makeup during school hours.   As the amount of time used to achieve advertised perception of beauty and perfection increases, these students' interest in academic success decreases (Butler-Barnes,

Estrada-Martinez, Colin, & Jones, 2015; Carter, 2013).  Even more disturbing is the negative

impacts on students', perceptions of self-worth (Hargreaves, & Tiggemann, 2004; Lupu, 2013;

Markey & Markey, 2010).

**Statement of the Problem**

Mckay (2014) found that Western beauty practices interfere with a woman's ability to

reach a level playing field with men in academia and in the work force since these practices take

up time, energy and money. For high school girls, how much additional time and energy a young

girl gives to her appearance may be reflected in how well or how poorly she is doing is school.

Moreover, basing one's self-worth on one's external appearance may actually be harmful to

one's mental health.  A study at the University of Michigan found that college students who base

their self-worth on external factors (including academic performance, appearance and approval

from others) reported more stress, anger, academic problems and relationship conflicts. They

also had higher levels of alcohol and drug use, as well as more symptoms of eating disorders

(Crocker, 2002).

Issues of self-worth often extend into the workplace, schools, and/or may support cultural

stereotypes. When women of color are depicted in the media it is usually as housekeepers, funny

sidekicks, the overweight best friend, or into personifying a cultural stereotype such as the loud

black girl, or the heavily accented Latina.   While these images further verify the negative effect

on females, who rarely see images of their own races depicted in a positive manner, it can have

lasting consequences for ethnically diverse high school girls.

Conventional media standards of beauty in America continue to have a major, negative

impact on the self-worth and academic performance of young women of color.  Numerous

research studies have explored the connections between media projections of beauty and self-

worth (Bessenoff, 2006; Fernandez, & Pritchard, 2012; Milkie, 1999; Patton, 2006).  This study also examines, however, how time spent on physical appearance may be impacting time used to improve academic performance for African American and Latina high school girls.

***Self- worth***

Historical stereotypes about physical appearance continue to persist and date as far back as slavery, a time in which black women were considered ugly and non-human in comparison with white women.  Although increasingly subtle and met with more rebuttals, this is a stereotype that persists today. As a result, the self-worth and education of many young women of color are negatively impacted.  For high school girls, this is especially true because they are becoming more interested in how they look, particularly how they look in the eyes of their peers (Mckay, 2014).  An attractive physical appearance becomes increasingly important and is often equated with being "perfect".  As this idea that looking perfect equates with being perfect persists, so does the perception that popularity and acceptance will be the inevitable result. This in turn increases the amounts of time girls spend trying to achieve and maintain a certain look, which is almost always unattainable.  Trying to achieve the ideal of Western beauty becomes a constant, labored process that usually leads to disappointing results that can further damage students' self-worth. The pressure to conform to this ideal of beauty is especially manifest in the use of cosmetics and in dissatisfaction with body. As further explained, young people draw upon class and gender distinctions that circulate within celebrity discourses (proper/improper, deserving/undeserving, talented/talentless and respectable/tacky) as they construct their own identities in relation to notions of work, aspiration and achievement, (Allen & Mendick, 2012).

*Cosmetics*

Wearing makeup to school is not a new concept, but it is one that has moved from being a morning ritual to becoming an all day, all the time obsession that has now crept into the classroom, and has become a form of distraction that prevents young girls from fully participating in their learning.  These girls are pressured by media and by each other to engage in time-consuming beauty practices while pretending that these practices are effortless (Jhally & Kilbourne, 2010).

For women of color, making the transformation to what is considered acceptable beauty often requires alterations to their natural features.  Well-known celebrities, whom teenage girls idolize, such as Beyonce, Queen Latifah, Jennifer Lopez, and Jennifer Hudson have all been photographed with lightened skins tones, lightened hair, thinner noses and pointy chins.  Women of color are encouraged to use skin-whitening products while, paradoxically, white women are encouraged to tan as a sign of wealth, health and leisure time (Rice, 2010).

For women of color, however, dark skin is considered to be undesirable (Mckay, 2014). For example, there is now an entire industry of face-whitening products designed to aid women of color in achieving the white beauty "ideal." Due to Western colonization and sexism, many cultures associate beauty with having light skin (Rice, 2010). This white beauty "ideal" is fostered by a profitable global market in skin-whitening products. Globally, cosmetic companies sell skin-whitening products through the Internet in order to avoid public scrutiny and state regulation of their products, since many of their products contain unsafe chemicals (Rice, 2010).  As a quick alternative to skin lightening, young girls also use foundation that is several shades lighter than their natural skin tones.

***Body Image***

Several important research studies have examined ethnically diverse female dissatisfaction with body image (Cheney, 2010; Ferguson, 2013; Petrie, Greenleaf, & Martin, 2010; Tiggemann, & Slater,  2014; Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk, Posavac, & Posavac,  2005). Unlike in the past, today a "thicker" figure is no longer seen as a standard of beauty; instead, being extremely slender is what is sought after. Being skinny is advocated by the fashion industry, television, the Internet, and other forms of media.  In an ethnographic study of 18 college women, Cheney (2010) studied how ethnically diverse women dealt with the messages of the dominant white societies' obsession with thinness and whether it affected their perceptions of an ideal body image.  She found body dissatisfaction and disturbed eating were common themes. Western ideas of beauty not only focus on thinness as ideal, but also recently created another form of pressure on young women.   As fashion trends change the "ideal" body type has also changed from being thin to being thin-waisted *and* having curves!

Research about the relationship between anorexia and/or bulimia has been primarily focused on young white women.  However, Crago, Shisslak, and Estes (1996) found that risk factors associated with eating disorders were more common among ethnic minority women who were younger, heavier, better educated, and identified with Western American middle-class values.

A study conducted in *Essence* magazine found that 65% of African-American women were dieting, and 21% were engaging in bulimia as a means of weight control (Rice, 2009). A study with young Native women found that almost half were dieting, 27% claimed they induced vomiting to lose weight and 11% used diet pills (Rice, 2009).

It is hard to pretend that race is not a major factor in the most harmful of beauty ideals when images of white women dominate all media, especially depictions featuring "beautiful or

desirable women". The issues go beyond makeup and body type, however. It is difficult to feel

beautiful when the media has so much power in setting society's standard for what beauty

means. In fact, the dominant culture requires a complete transformation of one's self that

extends to creating the perfect face, body, hair, skin tone, and life style.

### *Impact on academic performance*

Educational research comprises a rich body of literature on factors related to academic

performance. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on three factors that may

impact on the academic performance of ethnically diverse high school girls: Learning and multi-

tasking in the 21$^{st}$ century classroom, the relationship of time-on-task to academic performance,

and the impact of motivation on academic performance.

### *Learning and multi-tasking in the 21$^{st}$ century classroom*

In 21$^{st}$ century classrooms, students are increasingly required to use technology. According

to data compiled by Molner (2016), 54% of students and teachers will have access to a school-

issued computing device compared with 23% in 2012 (Molner, 2016). Students in the vast

majority of high school districts today are issued "1-1 computing" devices, which means putting

a PC laptop, hand-held or tablet PC into the hands of every student. In practice, curriculum is

often delivered by classroom teachers to students via computing devices, which may or may not

be paired with textbooks. The assumption behind "1-1 computing" is that the majority of

students are able to work independently in class (Penuel, 2006). Teachers report several benefits

to 1-1 computing such as increased student engagement, enhancements to project-based learning,

the broadening of learning beyond the classroom, and instant access to information that allows

students and teachers to investigate and question facts (Jackson, 2009).

In spite of these benefits, however, some teachers argue that technology creates unwelcome distractions.  With computer devices so readily accessible and habitual, students are tempted to watch videos, surf the web, or instant-message friends in lieu of academic tasks (Jackson, 2009).  Sometimes this results in students accessing social media sites instead of academic content related to school assignments.  High school girls who take advantage of independent computer class time may instead be watching the latest beauty trends.  Researching and maintaining a desired look requires constant viewing, studying, learning, and practicing of new beauty techniques-time consuming practices that can be at the expense of academic learning.  Repeated viewing of media websites has been connected with mental fatigue and distraction.  For high school students, the possible impacts on academic learning are troublesome.

Rosen (2015) found that, "the greater the number of distracting technologies that a student has available in their study environment at the outset of studying, the less likely they are to stay on task while studying" (pg. 69).

Meyer (2015) citing a 2006 University of California, Los Angles study found, that those who multitasked, such as using laptops to look at social media in class, were using different parts of their brain than those who were not multitasking.  Those who multitask are training their brains to be distracted, shorten their attention spans, and making themselves less able to think in cognitively demanding situations.

In a study of how technological distractions impact academic learning, Rosen, Carrier, and Cheever (2013) observed 263 middle school, high school, and university students studying for 15 minutes in their homes.  Participants averaged less than 6 minutes on task prior to switching most often to technological distractions including social media, texting, and preference

for task-switching.  Those who preferred to task-switch had more distractions, were more off-task, and had lower grade point averages.

These studies concluded that when students engaged in multi-tasking by looking at social media sites while studying academic content, it created distractions that reduced the amount of time spent on school work.

### The relationship of time-on-task to academic performance

For decades, educational researchers have studied the relationship between time-on-task and academic performance.  In this context, time-on-task refers to time during which students are paying attention to a learning task and attempting to learn (Cotton, 1989). Initial studies of time-on-task proposed that an increase in time-on-task led to increased student performance. One seminal meta-analyses of time-on-task and academic performance concluded that student learning depends on *how the available time is used*, not just on the time available   Students in 87 secondary-level remedial classes were found to achieve greater gains when involved in large amounts of interactive learning with their teachers.  The author concluded that time in which students were engaged in academic work was positively associated with student performance (Stallings, 1980).  These findings were supported in subsequent meta-analytic investigations.

 Karweit (1984) synthesized research on time and learning and found small positive associations between time and learning.  Many of the studies, however, were statistically significant when related to *engaged time* on learning.

A meta-analysis conducted by Cotton (1989) explored the effects of time factors in the learning process, as well.  The study was based on an analysis of 57 research studies, and included a wide range of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups largely conducted in the United States.  Cotton's general findings concluded that there is a strong positive relationship

between academic learning time (ALT) and both student achievement and attitudes.   Moreover, time spent in interactive activities with a teacher produced greater achievement and better attitudes than time-on-task in seatwork.

### *The impact of motivation on academic performance*

Several meta-analytic investigations noted the relationship between greater achievement and improved attitudes (Stallings, 1980).   In an effort to explore these findings, Multon, Brown, and Lent (1991) conducted a meta-analysis on the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic outcomes. As suggested by Akinson (1957) the motive to achieve and the motive to avoid failure influences behavior Relying on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1993), the researchers reviewed a final set of 39 studies using a relatively sophisticated quantitative meta-analytic methodology.  The findings supported Bandura's theory by suggesting that students' beliefs in self-efficacy are positively related to academic performance.

In his research on self-efficacy, Zimmerman (2000) concluded that the validity of self-efficacy as a predictor of students' motivation and learning is well established after over two decades of research.   More recent explorations of this topic have found similar results.

Motlagh, Amrai, Yazdine, et. al (2011) investigated the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement in high school students.  The researchers surveyed 250 high school students and concluded that self-efficacy is a strong factor in academic performance.

In summary, students who routinely multi-task by using social media while engaging in academic studies create distractions that, in turn, reduces the amount of time spent on engaged academic learning.  In addition, self-efficacy is strongly related to academic performance.  For those high school girls who routinely engage in beauty-focused media sites while studying academic content, the implications for academic performance could be profound.  Positive

beliefs in one's self-worth strongly correlate with positive academic performance. For ethnically diverse high school girls who try, and often fail, to achieve an unrealistic appearance, beliefs about self-worth also impact academic success.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine African American and Latina high school girls' understanding of how their self-worth and academic performance may be impacted by the amount of time used to achieve a desired physical appearance.

## Research Questions

This study seeks to address the overarching question of how the self-worth and academic performance of African American and Latina high school girls may be impacted by the amount of time used to achieve a desired physical appearance. In order to answer this question, two categories of discussion questions were created: three questions addressed issues of self-worth and four questions addressed academic performance.

## Theoretical Rationale

In order for a student to improve academic performance, she first has to know and understand what behaviors are affecting her grades, and what influences are encouraging the behaviors. This knowledge and understanding requires a clear perception of oneself. Self-worth/Motivation Theory asserts that a person's ability to achieve is directly linked to their perceptions of themselves. According to Covington (1984), the pioneer in the psychology field of self-worth and self-efficacy, most people will go to extraordinary lengths to "protect their sense of worth or self-value," even if it infringes on the ultimate outcome of their achievement

(Covington, 1992). Based on constructivist theory, self-worth theory posits that individuals construct their own subjective realities and then act on them. In order to create a subjective reality, however, individuals have a need for accurate self-knowledge and a need for self-validation. In this context, self-validation is defined as the need to gain the approval of others and to disassociate from events that might cause disapproval or rejection. Self-validation theory posits that some students will even choose to receive a failing grade in an attempt to protect their self -image. Some students they will choose to spend time improving their physical appearance for the same reason, sometimes at the expense of completing academic assignments.

Covington's research on the relationship between self-worth and achievement was extended with Bandura's research on self-efficacy-the belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task (Bandura, 1993). A student's sense of self-efficacy can play a major role in how she approaches goals, tasks, and challenges.

The theory of self-efficacy lies at the center of Bandura's social cognitive theory, which highlights the role of observational learning and social experience in the development of identity. Because self-efficacy is developed from external experiences and self-perception and is influential in determining the outcome of many events, it is an important aspect of social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy is defined as the personal perception of external social factors, wherein students who dwell on personal deficiencies give up quickly in the face of academic challenges and students with high self-efficacy are more likely to view difficult tasks as a challenge rather than something to be avoided (Bandura, 1993).

Because social cognitive theory posits that knowledge can be related directly to observing others in a social context rather than through cognition alone, it has been widely used as an

explanatory theory in the context of educational research. Within the context of social cognitive

theory, for example, teachers can work to improve students' emotional well-being, academic

skills, behavior, and the classroom environment (Pajares, 2002).

In addition, the practical implications of social cognitive theory and self-worth theory

impact everything in a high school environment, including classroom learning and students'

perceptions of their status within social groups.  For students who experience low self-worth,

social challenges often become greater.  Time spent on school work becomes less important than

time spent in striving to fit in with peers.  For high school girls who perceive that looking perfect

equates with popularity, the time they spend striving to achieve physical "perfection" may have

serious academic consequences.

## Background and Need for the Study

In a high school setting, the desire to "fit in" is a well-known phenomenon.  "Fitting in"

can equate to certain benefits that are sought out, and envied by many, such as social acceptance,

popularity, special privileges, and a general overall feeling of belonging. For many students, the

gateway to this popularity and acceptance may come in the form of physical beauty.

How does one's perception of self-worth stay intact when the media message promotes

beauty ideals that are impossible to achieve?  The perception of self and worth becomes defined

by an ideal of beauty that has become widely accepted by, not only women, but by men as well.

It is a promise of a better life that is particularity attractive to young girls. Many students are

obsessively trying to achieve an ideal of beauty in hopes of experiencing the benefits that it

promises. The Internet has become the primary resource for young girls in search of this

happiness, acceptance, and life-long success.

There are millions of media sites that offer tutorials, beauty advertisements, and beauty products, with celebrity spokespersons promising that with the right make-up and the right look, all is possible (Statista, 2015).  Students are spending countless hours, both during and outside of the classroom, on social media websites looking for guidance and comparing themselves with models, celebrities, or other "beautiful" people. There is a constant stream of new beauty tips, videos, and beauty products ads designed to lure students in. Most of the girls viewing these sites are unaware of the time that they are spending on these sites or of the, time and focus that they require.  This idea that beauty is the key to having a happy successful carefree life, is creating a problem in terms of self-worth for young women, for whom beauty is defined as being white, blond, and slender.

In many cases education is taking a back seat to the ideal of beauty as a means for succeeding in life.  In a technology driven society where media access is only a click away the message being spread to young girls is that being beautiful is as important, if not more important, than being educated.

The idea that beautiful adults experience a better life, a good job, a good, husband, or even fame and success, similarly, the idea of beauty during the high school years translates to popularity, acceptance, validation, inclusion, and entitlement.  For some girls school and classrooms have become a practice ground for achieving beauty goals that over shadows academic motivation and achievements. The underlying message that being put out and received by young girls is that they are not good enough being themselves and that most, if not all can achieve the same or more success through beauty as they would through education.

With technology so readily accessible via personal and school devices it is becoming increasingly more difficult to keep young girls focused on academics.  Young girls are becoming

obsessed with how they look and what that means, and less concerned and less focused on their academic future. The majority of media beauty ads suggest that beauty is the key to a successful life. This message is pushing young girls further from the idea of education as a means of achieving success. Many young men, influenced by similar media messages, are pressuring young girls to focus on physical appearance. Thus, peer pressure may result in young girls becoming less motivated to engage in their academic career, and more focused on fitting into widely accepted beauty ideals.

There are growing numbers of studies that show a link between social media use and poor academic performance in school. However, more research is needed to demonstrate whether there is a correlation between social media, media beauty ads, tutorials, "how to" and "do it yourself" videos ads, and possible effect(s) on young girls' self-worth and academic success.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions of these specific terms are used:

Self-Worth: refers to a feeling that you are a good person who deserves to treated with respect; the sense of one's own value or worth as a person

Secondary School: refers to a school intermediate between elementary school and college usually offering general technical, vocational, or college preparatory courses; high school

Academic Performance: refers to the outcome of education; the extent to which a student has achieved her educational goals

Academic Progress: refers to making progress towards the successful completion of academic coursework leading to a high school diploma

Girls and young women: refers to female high school students between 14 and 17 years of age.

Media Influence: refers to the actual force exerted by a media message, resulting in either change

or reinforcement in audience or individual beliefs

**Chapter 2 Review of the Literature**

This section is an examination of the research literature on the depiction of Western beauty ideals and its effects on young girls and young women of color. The information for this research was gathered from academic library searches of peer-reviewed articles using online resources.  Research information is organized in the following categories: Historical Context and Review of the Academic Research, followed by a Summary.

**Historical context**

Historically, African American women were made to believe that beauty is something that does not apply to them.  Patton (2006) argues that "many notions of beauty are rooted in hegemonically defined expectations… and that the continuance of hegemonically defining standards of beauty not only reify White European standards of beauty in the United States, but also that marginalization of certain types of beauty that deviate from the "norm," are devastating to women" (p. 24). Throughout history, African American women have been associated with roles that do not equate with beauty, such as caregivers, or servants. Historically and up to the present, beauty as it relates to the African American woman has been distorted by American white culture, and depictions of African American beauty have been created with racist stereotypes.

Today, although slightly more subtle, the historical message "that Black is not beautiful" continues and with the persuasiveness of the media young African American girls are pressured into conforming to western beauty ideals, which generally are not representative of their cultural uniqueness and are therefore often unattainable and damaging to their self-esteem.

**Review of the Academic Research**

The academic literature is organized thematically to address the ways that depictions of beauty influence women's perceptions of self-worth, with on-line and print media as the primary message source.  A second area of academic research is the influence of technology on the academic progress of students enrolled in schools in the 21st century.

*Media and the beauty ideal*

Through media images and advertisements western ideal of beauty, light skin, thin body, blond hair, has long been the standard for "perfection", and is an image that excludes diversity. Cheney (2010) examined how ethnically diverse women dealt with the messages of the dominant White society's obsession with thinness, and whether it affected their perceptions of an ideal body image. He presented his findings from an ethnographic study of 18 women college students living in the northeastern United States.

From the analysis of the interviews, Cheney identified and extracted several themes related to ethnicity, aesthetic body ideals, body dissatisfaction, and disturbed eating. His study found that ethnically diverse women coming of age in American society experience anxieties and emotional stress as they relate to others in their daily lives. Moreover, this research found how the body is a vehicle for social mobility and is used by women from marginalized identities to strategically negotiate social inequalities embedded in daily social relationships and interactions that more privileged women do not encounter. The author concluded that many ethnically diverse women, particular young high school aged women, are striving to achieve a western ideal of beauty and the privileges that seem to come with it.

According to Martin and Gentry (1997), advertising models are adversely affecting the way adolescents and pre-adolescent view themselves. The purpose of this study was to research

if adolescent girls with a motive for social comparison were affected differently by the images of beautiful women in ads, as opposed to those that were not. The author asked the question of whether or not the motive of social comparison played a role in how adolescent girls responded to advertising ads that used beautiful models to sell their products. The participants for this study included girls, grades four, six, and eight in a public school system in the Mideast where 98% of the population is white and the median family income is $31,144.

The author used a motive manipulate, mixed-model design that induces a self-evaluation motive, a self-improving motive, a self-enhancement motive through downward comparison, a self-enhancement motive through discounting the beauty of models, or none of general models (a control group who saw ads with no models). The students were exposed to three advertisement ads. After manipulation and exposure to the ads, the students gave ratings on self-perceptions of physical attractiveness, self-perceptions of body images, and self-esteem.

The results showed that motives do a play a role in change in self-perceptions of physical attractiveness, self-perception of self-esteem and body image. Physical attractiveness was lowered in all subjects who self-evaluated.  The author concludes that many young girls develop issues with their self-esteem as a result, particularly if the motive is social comparison.

Sociocultural theories of body image suggest that body dissatisfaction results from unrealistic societal beauty ideals, and one way of transmitting these ideals is through the mass media.  Hargreaves and Tiggeman (2004) examined the effect of exposure to images of idealized beauty in the media on adolescent girls' and boys' body image. The participants, 595 adolescents, viewed television commercials containing either images of the thin ideal for women, images of the muscular ideal for men, or non-appearance television commercials. Body dissatisfaction was measured before and after commercial viewing. It was found that exposure to

idealized commercials led to increased body dissatisfaction for girls but not for boys. Idealized commercials led to increased negative mood and appearance comparison for girls and boys, although the effect on appearance comparison was stronger for girls. Further, participants high on appearance investment reported greater appearance comparison after viewing idealized commercials than those less strongly invested in their appearance. The results suggest the immediate impact of the media on body image is both stronger and more normative for girls than for boys, but that some boys may also be affected.

Oney, Cole, and Sellers (2011) explored whether multiple dimensions of racial identity and gender moderated the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for African American men and women (n = 425) using an intersectional approach. Centrality, that is, strength of identification with racial group, private regard, positive feelings about racial group, public regard, positive feelings others have about racial group, and gender moderated the relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem for a sample of men (n = 109) and women (n = 316) college students from three regions of the United States. Body dissatisfaction was related to lower self-esteem only for those African Americans for whom race was less central to their identities. High private regard and low body dissatisfaction were synergistically associated with higher self-esteem. Similarly, low public regard and high body dissatisfaction were synergistically related to lower self-esteem. There was a positive main effect for assimilation ideology, emphasis on similarities between African Americans and Western society, on self-esteem; however, it was not a significant moderator. The relationship between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem was stronger for women than for men. This study extends our knowledge of the ways in which racial attitudes and gender shape how African Americans experience their bodies and are related to self-esteem.

In summary, these studies support this research by illustrating how devastating negative media influences can be on the self-esteem and self-perception of impressionable young girls.

### *Media use and perceptions self-worth*

Vonderen and Kennally (2012) examined the connection between media use and body dissatisfaction by juxtaposing the media with the internal factor of self-esteem and other social factors such as peer and parental attitudes. A sample of 285 female undergraduates completed measures of media exposure, a comparison with media figures, self-esteem, parental and peer attitudes toward body shape, and peer comparisons, as well as internalization of the thin-ideal and body dissatisfaction measures. Overall, comparison to media figures was associated with internalization of the thin ideal but not as strongly as peer attitudes and self-esteem. Contrastingly, peer comparisons and self-esteem were observed to be the strongest indicators of body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, social/environmental influences and self-esteem proved to be the strongest indicators of body dissatisfaction, which suggests that the indirect effect of media messages on body dissatisfaction is an important area for further examination.

Raymer (2015) conducted a similar study to determine the significance social networking sites like Facebook have on the self-esteem of undergraduate students. The purpose of this study was to explore the effect that social networking sites such as Facebook have on self-esteem and body image satisfaction. Specifically, this study sought to discover a link between frequency of Facebook use and negative self-esteem and body image, especially among females. This study examined the correlation between Facebook and self-esteem among college students by measuring the collective amount of time spent on Facebook, the amount of time spent on one's own profile and other's profiles, how often one posts statuses and uploads pictures, and measuring feelings of self-esteem and body image. Data was collected using a survey designed

to gather information regarding time spent on Facebook and one's feelings of self-worth and self-esteem.

An anonymous pool of undergraduate students was asked to participate in this study. Previous research and data of Internet use and its effect on self-esteem and body image was collected in order to formulate hypotheses for this study. Hypothesis 1: More frequent Facebook use and interaction is negatively related to self-esteem. Hypothesis 2: Female students spend more time on Facebook compared to male students. Hypothesis 3: More exposure on Facebook leads to lower body image satisfaction and a greater drive for thinness. Hypothesis 4: Self-esteem influences Facebook interaction and psychological wellbeing.

The hypotheses for the current study was that more frequent Facebook use and interaction would negatively affect self-esteem levels. After reviewing the data from the Facebook Intensity Scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, there did not appear to be a significant correlation between the time spent on Facebook and self-esteem levels. These results indicate that in this particular group of undergraduate college students, frequent Facebook use does not negatively affect self-esteem levels.

The second hypothesis posited that females spend more time on Facebook than males. After reviewing the data from the Facebook Intensity Scale and comparing overall time on Facebook to gender, this hypothesis was supported. On a daily basis, females do spend more overall time in minutes on this social networking site than males. Past research has indicated that females do spend more time on Facebook collectively than males do, and they tend to spend more time uploading photos, posting statuses, and viewing others' profiles. Therefore, the results of this study are consistent with previous research that indicates females spend more collected time on Facebook than their male counter-parts.

After reviewing the data for the third hypothesis, that increased exposure on Facebook leads to lower body image satisfaction and a greater drive for thinness, results indicated that there was no direct effect of increased Facebook exposure on body image satisfaction. However, results did indicate a relation between gender and body image satisfaction when comparing mean scores of the Eating Attitudes-26 Scale and gender, showing that females are more at risk for disordered eating. Even further, results indicated that females have lower levels of body image satisfaction than males. Previous studies have shown that females are more at risk for developing eating disorders and have lower levels of body image satisfaction much in part due to the media and social comparison, which lead to a greater drive for thinness.

While this study did not find a link between social media exposure and body image dissatisfaction, it did find that females do tend to have an overall lower level of body image satisfaction and a higher level of disordered eating compared to males.

Finally, after reviewing the data for hypothesis four, that self-esteem influences Facebook interaction and psychological well-being and that there is a relationship between the numbers of Facebook friends, overall Facebook usage, and self-esteem levels, results indicated that there is no direct connection between self-esteem and the number of Facebook friends or Facebook usage. However, results did indicate that females tend to have a larger number of friends on Facebook than males. Previous research indicated that self-esteem plays a role in the number of Facebook friends one has and the amount of time spent on Facebook. Studies showed that those with low self-esteem levels tend to have a larger amount of Facebook friends and spend more time on the social networking site compared to those with high levels of self-esteem.

Granatino and Haytko (2013) conducted a study of body image, confidence and media influence on middle school adolescents using an open-ended survey with a group of seventh

grade students, ages 12-15, attending a diverse middle school in Florida.  Three main cultural

aggregations were represented in the survey: African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic.

The results showed that out of the three cultures surveyed, African American females

showed the lowest influence from the media, while Hispanic females showed the greatest media

influence.  In all three categories, the majority of males were consistently uninfluenced by media

pressure to look a specific way.  In each culture, only one male per category, listed media

influence on the way they look and feel about themselves.  Interestingly, the researchers also

found that as the amount of time used to achieve advertised perception of beauty and perfection

increases, these students' interest in academic success decreased.

Dohnt and Tiggeman (2006) conducted a study aimed at prospectively examining the role

of peer and media influences in the development of body satisfaction, incorporating the desire

for thinness and satisfaction with appearance, in young girls, as well as the relationship between

body satisfaction and self-esteem. A sample of 97 girls 5-8 years of age completed individual

interviews at Time 1 and 1 year later at Time 2 examining girls' desire for thinness, appearance

satisfaction, and self-esteem 1 year later. In addition, the watching of appearance-focused

television programs was temporally antecedent to appearance satisfaction. Finally, girl's' desire

for thinness was found to temporally precede low self-esteem. Thus, as early as school entry,

girls appear to already live in a culture in which peers and the media transmit the thin ideal in a

way that negatively influences the development of body image and self-esteem.

The effects of the media's perceptions of Western beauty ideals on diverse cultures was

examined by Ng and Chang (2014) in research that addressed the question of female

advertisements' and whether or not they reflect the ideal female image. The purpose of this study

was to investigate how Chinese adolescent girls and boys construct their own ideal female

images in response to gendered advertisements based on Arnett's (1995) theory of self-socialization and Hirschman and Thompson's (1997) three interpretive strategies. A qualitative interview study was conducted for this purpose.

Thirty-two adolescents aged 15 to 19 living in 16 different provinces in China were recruited for a face-to-face interview. Three advertisements were shown depicting an elegant woman, an urban sophisticated female and a strong woman, and interviewees were asked to describe the appearance, the personality, and the work and family life of the female character in each advertisement. They were asked to choose one of them as most closely representing their ideal female image. The interviewees constructed their ideal female images from the advertisement that best suited their ideal appearance, personality, and work and family life. Female interviewees aspired to be like the elegant woman, identified with the urban sophisticated female and rejected the strong woman in the ads. Male interviewees appreciated the urban sophisticated female but rejected the strong woman.

The results of imposing western beauty ideals on other cultures is supported with Mckay's (2014) research, which examined the impact of Western beauty pressures on a select group of young Canadian women. The data was gathered through qualitative semi-structured interviews. An intersectional analysis of oppression was used to create the interview questions in order to learn how women's race, class, sexuality, gender identity and ability backgrounds shape their experiences with Western beauty pressures. The interviews were analyzed using the voice-centered relational method of data analysis. The 13 women interviewed discussed their perception of Western beauty pressures, how these pressures shape their engagement with beauty practices and strategies they employ for resistance. The results are organized under six main

themes: (a) Gender roles and beauty (b) Education, careers and beauty practices (c) Influence of family, friends, relationships and peers (d) Cosmetics (e) Weight (f) Resistance.

In relation to gender roles and beauty, Mckay (2014) found that being a female athlete while trying to meet Western standards of idealized femininity was problematic. Since sports are typically considered to be a male domain, women who enter this space are often ridiculed, masculinized and harassed. This harassment often stems from the perception that female athletes blur the lines between what is considered "proper" gender roles for men and women in Western culture. Moreover, since make- up is not usually worn during competition, women who participate in male-dominated sports are often referred to as "dykes."

Education, career, and beauty practices are also affected. Participants of the study reported that societal expectations related to Western beauty practices interfered with women's' abilities to reach a level playing field with men in academia and the workplace. Participants reported that the message women receive is that they can be pretty or smart, but not both.

The influence of family, friends, relationships, and peers was one of the main determining factors in shaping women's' experiences with their bodies. Participants discussed feeling the need to wear makeup in order to hide flaws and meet western standards of femininity. In addition, Mckay found that a woman's race and class play a major role in shaping how they experience beauty "ideals" of Western cosmetic companies.

Finally, although all of the participants experienced pressure to conform to the thin Western beauty standard, they experienced different intensity levels of pressure. As a result, participants found unique ways to resist depending on which strategies were available to them.

### *Media use, multitasking, and the impact on academic performance*

In a study conducted by Junco and Cotton (2012), the proliferation and ease of access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as Facebook, text messaging, and

instant messaging has resulted in ICT users being presented with more real-time streaming data than ever before. Unfortunately, this has also resulted in individuals increasingly engaging in multitasking as an information management strategy.  The participant group was 64% female, and 88% were of traditional college age, 18 to 22 years old. Using web survey data from more 1,839 students at a public university the researchers examined how the use of Facebook — and engagement in other forms of digital activity — while trying to complete schoolwork was associated with college students' grade point averages (GPA).

The study found that students reported spending a large amount of time using ICTs on a daily basis. Students reported frequently searching for content not related to courses, using Facebook, emailing, talking on their cell phones, and texting while doing schoolwork. Hierarchical linear regression analyses revealed that using Facebook and texting while doing schoolwork were negatively associated with overall college GPA.

The study concluded that, "students spent the most time using Facebook, searching for non-school-related information online, and emailing. While doing schoolwork outside of class, students reported spending an average of 60 minutes per day on Facebook, 43 minutes per day searching, and 22 minutes per day on email. Lastly, students reported sending an average of 71 texts per day while doing schoolwork." The data also suggest that "using Facebook and texting while doing schoolwork were negatively predictive of overall GPA.

Sana, Westin, and Cepeda (2012) examined the effects of in-class laptop use on student learning in a simulated classroom. Forty-four undergraduate students from a large comprehensive university in a large Canadian city participated in the study. All participants were enrolled in an Introductory Psychology course and received course credit for participating in the experiment. Participants represented a variety of undergraduate disciplines (i.e., not only

psychology). They were recruited using an online portal designed for psychology research, which explained that the study involved listening to a class lecture and filling out a few questionnaires. Only students who could bring a personal laptop to the experiment were invited to participate. Forty participants were included in the final data analysis, which included two experimental conditions: multitasking (n ¼ 20) and no multitasking (n ¼ 20).

Researchers found that participants who multitasked on a laptop during a lecture scored lower on a test compared to those who did not multitask, and participants who were in direct view of a multitasking peer scored lower on a test compared to those who were not. The results demonstrate that multitasking on a laptop poses a significant distraction to both users and fellow students and can be detrimental to comprehension of lecture content.

Owusu-Acheau and Larson's (2015) study sought to assess students' use of social media and its effect on academic performance of tertiary institutions students in Ghana. Questionnaires were used for collecting data. Out of one thousand five hundred and seventy-eight copies of the questionnaire distributed, one thousand five hundred and eight were retrieved which represented a response rate of 95.5 %.

The study found that the majority of the respondents had mobile phones which also had Internet facility on them and had knowledge of the existence of many media sites. The study further confirmed that most of the respondents visit their social media sites using their phones and spend between thirty minutes to three hours per day. In addition, the study revealed that the use of social media sites had affected academic performance of the respondents negatively and that there was a direct relationship between the use of social media sites and academic performance.

In a similar study, Mingles and Adams (2015) investigated social media network participation and academic performance in senior high schools. The study was aimed at identifying social media network sites and their usage among students, how students networked

and participated on social media networks, time invested by students on social networks, the

effects of social media on students' grammar and spelling as well as the effects of social network

participation on the student's academic performance within the context of the social learning and

the use and gratification theories.

To achieve the objectives of the research, the study used a mixed method approach,

which involved the survey of students in four senior high schools and interviews of heads of the

senior high schools.  The majority of respondents used Whatsapp and Facebook for making

friends and chatting.

The results concluded that majority of respondents experienced negative effects such as

poor grammar and spelling, late submission of assignment, less study time and poor academic

performance due to the heavy participation on social media networks. Furthermore, there was a

high addiction rate among students in the usage of social media networks.

**Summary of the Literature**

The majority of schools today are providing student with one to one computing devices,

laptops or tablets. While there have been reported successes, there have also been challenges.

The idea behind one to one computing was to enhance students' learning by providing real time

access to world events. Individualized access to computers has also providing students with

instant access to millions of streaming websites, such as Facebook, and Instagram, which are

popular social media site for young adults.  Student are using their devices, however, to engage

in off-task activities such as web surfing, and/or attempting to complete two or more task at a

time, (multitasking.) which has been shown to decrease retention of information and lower

overall student academic performance.

Many of the websites that students are viewing includes advertisements that are designed to encourage the use of beauty products, most of them targeted at young adults.  Adolescents who struggling to "fit in", are particularly drawn to these websites, which may interfere with academic achievement/motivation, and can have a negative impact on their self-worth.  Most of the advertisements being viewed by young girls depict images of western beauty standards and exclude ethnically diverse beauty; therefore, these advertisements can be especially harmful to adolescents who do not fit the ideal beauty standard and whose beauty is rarely represented. As a result, many young girls are turning to make-up as a means for obtaining beauty, popularity, and acceptance in the belief that this is what it will take for them to be successful in life.

**Chapter 3 Methodology**

**Research Design**

This study uses a descriptive, qualitative design.  The researcher conducted this study using Participatory Action Research (PAR) designed to document the effects of America's ideal of beauty, as depicted through media sites, on the self-worth and academic progress of young high school girls from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The PAR methodology relies on the use of informants as a means for collecting information and data, and it provides a bridge between the separation of knowledge and action (Khan, Bawani, & Aziz, 2013). The use of informants is crucial to the PAR approach. Informants usually inhabit social and professional roles in communities, and provide knowledge and information related to the education within a community (McKenna & Main, 2013). For this study, the students were the informants.

PAR is considered a variant form of action research (AR) and is often used to support the researchers need to understand the community and its priorities. The researcher is in a position to help identify and address issues that community members see as important (McKenna & Main, 2013). For this research, the community consists of teenage girls from diverse ethnic backgrounds who share a desire to obtain a certain ideal of beauty, and the amount of time they are willing to invest in obtaining that look.

**Ethical Standards**

This paper adheres to ethical standards for the protection of human subjects provided by the American Psychological Association (2010).  The nature of this study involved collecting data from students as part of a Life Skills curriculum that the researcher implemented in the

classroom. A research proposal was submitted, reviewed and approved by the thesis advisor. Additionally, the site principal approved the proposal.

Before data collection began, the researcher explained the purpose of the research. Upon completion of data collection, all responses were coded to preserve privacy and anonymity. All data collected was for the purpose of a research study that would be secured in the Dominican University archive, Dominican Scholar.

**Site and Participants**

One high school, located in a lower, middle class community in one of the nine bay area counties, was selected for this study. The high school offers a standard high school curriculum leading to a California high school diploma. Of a total of 105 faculty, 63 are fully credentialed teachers serving 1,124 students. Faculty demographics consist of 59% Caucasian, 16% African American, 16% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 5% Other. Of the 63 faculty who teach, 12.2% are in their first or second year in the profession. The student body consists of 91% minority enrollment with the majority being Hispanic. The enrollment consists of 45% Hispanic, 24% African American, 12% Asian, 9% White, 7% Filipino, and 1% each of Pacific Islander, Mixed Race, and American Indian/Alaska Native. Fifty-four percent (54%) of the student population is female and 46% is male.

**Access and Permission**

As a teacher of record at the high school, the researcher was granted permission by the high school principal to conduct the study, which involved a discussion with students using key questions. Because these students were under the age of 18, the researcher notified each parent and obtained written permission indicating approval for students to participate in the study.

**Data Collection Procedures**

To explore the influence of media's perception of beauty on ethnical diverse teenage girls, the researcher conducted discussions with 11 participants to determine the amount of off task web searching student engage in during school hours, and their perceptions of its effects on their academic performance and self-worth.

Group discussions were conducted with 11 high school girls between the ages of 14-17, enrolled in grades 9-12. Two cultural aggregations were represented in this study: African American and Hispanic (see Table 1). The discussions took place over the course of seven days. Discussions were conducted within the classroom, for 30 minutes in length.

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

| Ages | % (n) |
| --- | --- |
| 14 | 18% (n=2) |
| 15 | 36% (n=4) |
| 16 | 18% (n=2) |
| 17 | 27% (n=3) |
| **Ethnicity** | |
| African American | 64% (n=7) |
| Latina American | 36% (n=4) |

Students engaged in discussions with the researcher over a 7-day period in a vacant high school classroom, within school hours and during non-academic times. All of the students who participated in this study did so voluntarily. To encourage spontaneous responses, participants were not made aware of the questions ahead of time. Each student verbally answered each of the seven questions asked by the researcher. These responses were recorded using a standard recording device and later transcribed for analysis.

Seven interview questions were selected from a researcher-designed instrument for the individual interviews.  These semi-structured discussion questions were designed to facilitate conversation related to perceptions of beauty, time spent on beauty vs. time on academics, perceptions of impact on academic performance, and perceptions of the role of beauty in their futures (see Table 2).   Each question was asked of each participant in the same order and each was given approximately 20 minutes to respond.   Occasionally, follow-up probes were used by the researcher to clarify ambiguous responses or to encourage students to further explore unanticipated answers.

The research took place during regularly scheduled school hours. To protect student's identity, each participant was assigned a number to use throughout the discussion.

**Table 2:  Semi-structured Questions**

| |
|---|
| 1.  When you hear the word "beautiful" what is the first think that comes to your mind? |
| 2.  How much time each morning do you spend applying makeup? |
| 3.  How often do you feel the need to reapply or check your makeup throughout the day? |
| 4.  How do you think this affects your focus in class?  How does it affect your grades? |
| 5.  How do you respond when, or if, your grades are affected? |
| 6.  How much time do you devote to studying?  How much time do you spend keeping up with current fashion make-up trends? |
| 7.  What role does fashion and make-up play in your future? |

At the mid-point in the interview process, four (4) participants declined to continue with the discussions and dropped out of the study.  Therefore, data were reported analyzed based on a total of 11 respondents.

Question 1 – When you hear the word "beautiful" what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

Question 2 – How much time each morning do you spend applying make-up?

Question 3 – How often do you feel the need to reapply or check your make-up throughout the day?

Question 4 – How do you think this effect your focus in class? How does it affect your grade?

Question 5 – How do you respond when, or if you're grades are affected?

Question 6 – How much time do you spend on homework or studying compared to the time you spend being on your phone?

Question 7 - What role does fashion and make-up play in your future?

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were audio recorded and later scribed verbatim.  A second reader was selected by the researcher as a way to avoid bias in the transcript analysis process.  Initially, discussions were reviewed independently by both the researcher and the second reader to identify common themes and key words across conversations.

A final analysis was conducted collaboratively to refine an understanding of the common themes.  This was accomplished by collating and counting each response to identify the number of times each theme was mentioned.  Through subsequent discussions between both readers, this method was then used to identify each of the major themes. The collaborative process facilitated

a greater understanding of the data, and helped to prevent biases, which may occur with a single

researcher. Last, a list of quotations supporting each theme was taken from the transcripts and

organized thematically.

**Chapter 4 Results**

Four major themes were identified as follows:

1. Beauty is equated with success

2. A majority of participants devoted significant amounts of time to make-up application before and during school hours

3. Media has a statistically significant influence on high school girls' perceptions of beauty

4. More time is devoted to media use than to studying.

Participants' responses to the question of the relationship between beauty and success were the most troubling finding from this study. One hundred percent (n=11) of the participants believed that physical beauty was the most important quality in having a successful life. This belief was created and reinforced by students' active use of popular websites, which stream, "how to" videos and advertisements that promote beauty and success as a single entity.

Moreover, 100% of the participants reporting spending time applying and/or replying their make-up, before, during, and throughout school the school day. The range of responses, from 66% of students reporting applying or reapplying their make up 2 to 7 times during school hours, to 35% reporting applying make-up only once throughout the entire day, does suggest a variance in participants' emphasis on the importance of make-up. But, no one was willing to attend school without first applying make-up.

Media was found to have a significant influence on participants' responses regarding their perceptions of beauty. Sixty-four percent (64%) of participants associated the concept of "ideal" beauty with celebrities they saw in media advertisements, and equated celebrities' material wealth, marriages, and happiness with their beauty. Eight percent (8%) of the

participants reported using websites, media messages, and images, as a personal guide on how to be "better", and how to succeed.

Finally, more time was spent on media devices than on academic work. Furthermore, a significant portion of media time was used for viewing beauty-advertising sites. The study found that 50% of the respondents visited their social media sites while doing homework, and 30% didn't do homework at all because they were using their phones.

Overall, the students in this study shared a strong desire to engage in beauty practices that were strongly influenced by the media's definition of beauty as being primarily White, slender and blond, and were willing to do so at the cost of their education. All of these participants reported that by meeting unrealistic expectations of beauty they hoped to achieve a happier, more successful lifestyle.

There were no significant differences in the data between African American participants and Latina American students. Data analysis of common themes found no difference in the participants' views on the importance and use of makeup as a means of gaining social acceptance or material wealth. Both groups were negatively affected by their pursuit to achieve western beauty ideals. Both groups had similar responses to media use and the importance of academic achievement. Regarding the theme of beauty and success, however, the Latina American girls reported slightly higher value in securing a better family life, i.e. a good husband and home, while the African American girls seemed to view beauty as a means a gaining wealth and popularity

**Major theme 1: Beauty is equated with success.**

Historically, it was believed that a good education was the first step towards a successful, happy life, followed, of course, by good health and family. Rarely did this belief include beauty

as a starting point of success.  While education continues to offer economic opportunities for the

majority of people, perceptions of the role of beauty have changed.  With the ease of media

access and media's obsession with glamorous successful people, beauty is being advertised as a

means to a happy ending.  Student #7's response to the question of how beauty would play a role

in her future was typical: *"my mom doesn't have to work…she took care of her beauty, her face*

*and body, and that's why she has a good life."*  Student #7 went on to state: *"It's how I will get*

*at better husband and better life, and be accepted, and get all sorts of opportunities".*

The belief that attaining beauty as a means to success and happiness was echoed

throughout each interview.  A similar response was shared by Student #11: *"I think it will be, is*

*necessary to able to make yourself beautiful. It is important and it gets you things, like jobs, and*

*friends that you might not get if you're not. Make-up can boost your confidence and make you,*

*like go for things you wouldn't if you think you're ugly or something."*  Once again, the belief

that a beauty ideal is key to success is reflected in the response by Student #8: *"You have to look*

*the part to get the part." (*Researcher asks *"What part?)* *". . . anything, friends, money, jobs, and*

*a good boyfriend, respect,* (pause), *that's how it is, being pretty helps, When you're not people*

*be so mean, they don't care",* (Researcher asks, *"People like who?"),* *"Boys, girls, strangers,*

*TV, everybody".*  Student # 9 beauty also reported physical beauty as a key for success in her

response: *"People in the world will judge you by how you well dress and how pretty you are, in*

*school it gets you popular; in real life it will be the same".*

Aside from the ideas that student have about beauty and it relationship to success one of

the more troubling responses came from Student #5: *"It will help me to look different, I have a*

*big nose and like dark spots and dark skin, and all short hair, but with make-up and hair*

*extensions and stuff like that. I can change whenever I want and I'm accepted when I have on*

*make-up and when I don't people are different, mean."*

**Major theme 2:  A majority of participants devoted significant amounts of time to make-up application before and during school hours**

When students were asked to discuss the amount of time before school they spend applying make-up the results showed that 50% student spent have learned to apply their makeup in within 15 minutes or less.  Student #2 offered a typical response: *"I can put my makeup on in 15 minutes."* Similarly, Student 10 reported: *"It only takes me like 15 minutes, maybe a little more."*  Approximately 30% reported needing at least an hour or more to apply their makeup. A typical makeup routine for this group is described by Student 1: *"It takes me like a hour, or more. My mom gets so mad because we only have one bathroom and I have four brother, so we be running late every morning, but I don't care though, I'm not leaving the house all tore-up."* A similar response was shared by Student 4: *"It takes me a long time because I want it to be perfect, so that I don't get talked about. When I don't wear make-up kids, especially boys, they say I look like a boy, and I do."* 15% of the participant reported being able to apply their makeup within 20 to 45 minutes, as reported by student 2: *"It used to take me an hour or more when I was younger"*, (how young?), *"like 13, but now I can do it in like 30/45 minutes, if I need too"*. In an attempt to look more natural Student 2 reports: *"I don't wear a lot of make-up, because I like to look natural, so I wear a lot of natural colors. It usually takes me around like twenty, thirty minutes."* Less than 5% of the participants reported being able to apply makeup in under thirty minutes, such as Student #10: *"I can't wear make-up at home, so I put in on at school, in the morning before class or when we're not doing anything in first period. It only takes me like fifteen minutes, maybe a little more."*

When asked how much time participants spent re-applying make-up throughout the school day, 73% reported re-applying make-up. The number of times make-up was re-applied ranged from once per day to over seven times a day, however. Student #4 stated that she applied make-up "*at the end of every class*". Sixty-four percent (64%) of participants reported re-applying make-up two to four times per day. Student #2 offered a typical response: *". . . twice before lunch and at the end of the day, seventh period."* Student #7 reported: *"Maybe two or three times when the regular teacher is there or in a class where the teacher don't care or if there is a sub then we do make-up all period."* Student #10 was the only participant who reported the following: *"One time in the morning. . .or during class but first period only though."*

**Major theme 3: Media has a significant influence on high school girls' perceptions of beauty.**
Seventy-three percent (73%) of the participants' beauty ideals are influences by celebrity figures. Student #5 reports: *"People you see on TV, but regular people, people like Angelina Jolie, and Scarlet Johansson, they have perfect hair, and skin, and beauty, and they have money and popularity. They can do whatever they want to do in life"*.

In a similar response to the question of their thoughts on what beautiful means, Student #4 states: *"Not me for sure"*, (Researcher: "*Then who?*"), *"I think about people like Beyonce, or Zendaya"*,(Researcher: "*What makes them beautiful?*"), *"I don't know, they have money and friends and nice things, and they get to go to parties and they get to be popular"*, (Researcher: "*Why don't you think you're beautiful?*"), *"I am when I have on my makeup put myself together, and then people notice, and then I'm popular,"* (Researcher: "*Popular with who?*"), *"everybody at school, even teachers are nicer, they say you look nice today or something like that and they don't like fuss at you as much., so I wear it all the time at school but not at home."*

On the other hand, 13% of participants reported that their mothers were representatives of beauty.  Sadly, however, their perceptions were based on external values, as evident with Student #4: *"My mother, I think she is beautiful. She never leaves the house looking less than 100"*. And, this response from Student #2: *"I think of myself, it's how I have to be in this world and in this school in order it get by, if you're not looking your best people judge you for that."* This ideal was similar to that of Student #6: *"I think of me, but it takes work (like?), hair, nails, eyebrows, eyelashes, lips, everything has to work together"*.

### Major theme 4: More time is devoted to media use than to studying.

One-hundred percent (100%) of the participants reporting using media devices for longer periods of time compared with time spent studying, and media devices were used by students during most of their free time.  A typical response was expressed by Student  #6: *"I study when I need to, but I really am addicted to social media I am on my phone all the time at home."*  This was also reflected in the response of Student #2*: "I hate studying, but I do it sometimes, I'm on my phone all the times* (Researcher: *"Doing what?"*), *"whatever, watching memes, videos, movie, talking to my friends, whatever."* A similar response was reported by Student #7: *"I spend as much time as I need studying, but I do spend a lot of time looking at what's new. I really like DIY tutorials, but not just for make-up and hair, but for all sorts of other things too, and I love video memes, and skits, they are so funny,* (pause) *and of course movies, and music and videos, and thing like that."*

Two of 11 participants reported never studying and/or never completing homework, as stated by Student #3: *"I don't do homework or study. My life is too crazy and busy, and my phone is my life, I live on it, it keeps me connected to everything."*  A similar statement was expressed by Student #6: *"I don't study, but I will do homework sometimes, if I feel like it. I'm*

*on my phone all the time, I mean all the time, keeping up with the latest everything. People are*

*making so much money and getting discovered for doing everything, even actin' crazy, but*

*especially for being beautiful and bole, and sexy. It pays, but you can't be too old and doing this*

*cause' it don't look right."*

Even though some students report doing homework and studying it does not take the

place of media use.  Only one of the 11 participants reported studying and doing homework all of

the time, along with using a media devices. Student #4 stated: *"I study and do my homework all*

*the time, but I'm on my phone all the time too, to check out new products for your face and hair,*

*sometimes I'm on the phone 'til like two or three in the morning."*

Table 3 illustrates the most important themes and sub-themes found in this study.

**Table 3:**

**Major Theme #1:  Beauty is equated with success**

| Sub-themes | Participant responses |
|---|---|
| The importance of beauty in the future | "My mom doesn't have to work. . .she took care of her beauty, her face and body, and that's why she has a good life. It's how I will get a better husband and better life, and be accepted, and get all sorts of opportunities." (Student # 7) <br> "I think it will be, is necessary to be able to make yourself beautiful.  It is important and it gets you things, like jobs and friends that you might not get if you're not.  Make-up can boost your confidence and make you like go for things you wouldn't if you think you're ugly or something."  (Student #7) |
| Beauty means acceptance | "It will help me look different, I have a big nose and like dark spots and dark skin, and all short hair, but with make-up and hair extensions and stuff like that, I change whenever I want and I'm accepted when I have on make-up and when I don't people are different, mean." (Student #5) <br> "You have to look the part to get the part. . .anything, friends, money, jobs, and a good boyfriend, respect. . .that's how it is, being pretty helps.  When you're not people be so mean, they don't care. . ." (Student #8) <br> "People in the world will judge you by how well you dress and how pretty you are, in school it gets you popular; in real life it will be the same."  (Student #9) |

**Major Theme # 2:  Significant, but varying, amounts of time devoted to make-up**

**application.**

| Sub-themes | Participant responses |
|---|---|
| Time used to apply make-up before school | "It only takes me like 15 minutes, maybe a little more." (Student #10)<br><br>"It takes me like an hour, or more.  My mom gets so mad because we have one bathroom and I have four brothers, so we be running late every morning, but I don't care though, I'm not leaving the house all tore-up." (Student #1)<br><br>"It used to take me an hour or more when I was younger. . .like 13, but now I can do it in like 30/45 minutes, if I need to." (Student #2) |
| Time used to re-apply make-up during school hours varied | ". . . at the end of every class." (Student #4)<br><br>". . . twice before lunch and at the end of the day, seventh period." (Student #2)<br><br>"Maybe two or three times when the regular teacher is there or in a class where the teacher don't care or if there is a sub then we do make-up all period." (Student #7)<br><br>"One time in the morning. . .or during class but first period only though." (Student #10) |

**Major Theme # 3:  Media has a significant influence on perceptions of beauty.**

| Sub-themes | Participant responses |
|---|---|
| The importance of celebrity beauty ideals | "People you see on TV, but regular people, people like Angelina Jolie and Scarlet Johansson, they have perfect hair, and skin, and beauty, and they have money and popularity.  They can do whatever they want to do in life." (Student #5)<br><br>"I think about people like Beyonce, or Zendaya. . .I don't know, they have money and friends and nice things, and they get to go to parties and they get to be popular. . .I am (beautiful) when I have on my make-up put myself together, and then people notice, and then I'm popular. . .even teachers are nicer. . .and they don't fuss at you as much." (Student #4) |
| Mothers as representatives of beauty | "My mother, I think she is beautiful.  She never leaves the house without looking less than 100." (Student #4) |
| Students try to be seen as beautiful | "I think of myself, it's how I have to be in this world and in this school in order to get by, if you're not looking your best people will judge you for that." (Student #2)<br><br>"I think of me, but it takes work, like hair, nails, eyebrows, eyelashes, lips, everything has to work together." (Student #6) |

**Major Theme #4:  More time devoted to media use than to academic work.**

| Sub-themes | Participant responses |
|---|---|
| Media time is greater than study time | **"**I study when I need to, but I'm really addicted to social media.  I am on my phone all the time at home."  (Student #6)<br><br>"I spend as much time as I need studying, but I do spend a lot of time looking at what's new.  I really like DIY tutorials, but not just for make-up and hair. . ."  (Student #7) |
| Media time replaces study time | "I don't do homework or study.  My life is too crazy and busy, and my phone is my life.  I live on it, it keeps me connected to everything."  (Student #3)<br><br>"I don't study, but I will do homework sometimes, if I feel like it.  I'm on my phone all the time, I mean all the time, keeping up with the latest everything."  (Student #6)<br><br>"I study and do my homework all the time, but I'm on my phone all the time, too, to check out new products for your face and hair.  Sometimes I'm on the phone 'til like two or three in the morning."  (Student #4) |

**Chapter 5 Discussion**

**Summary of Major Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine African American and Latina high school girls' understanding of how their self-worth and academic performance may be impacted by the amount of time used to achieve a desired physical appearance. The findings show that the students who participated in this study are affected, both socially and academically, by the amount of time they spent on media beauty sites, and the amount of time they spend applying make-up while trying to achieve a desired physical appearance. Student perspectives on beauty, as it relates to their future success, were based on the influences of western beauty ideals, and media messages that equate beauty with success.

The most popular sites viewed by these participants are designed to attract adolescent girls by promoting beauty, and includes images of celebrities, DIY tutorials, and make up tips. According to Student #5, "*I spent a lot of time on my phone, but it's not always to for fashion and makeup, I like to celebrity watch, look at reality TV, and check my Instagram.*" Many of the women depicted on these sites represent a western ideal of beauty, however, and therefore excludes the ethnically diverse beauty images that resemble participants from this study. As a result, the overall message received by these students is that they are not good enough. Adams-Bass, et al (2014) expressed concern that "Black American youth may accept negative stereotype TV images of Black people as valid, resulting in a negative impact on identity and self-esteem" (p. 387). This concern was validated by Student #5, "*I have a big nose and like dark skin, and short hair, but when I wear makeup and hair extensions, I can change, I'm accepted, when I don't people are different, mean.*"

Participants in this study expressed high hopes for obtaining success through beauty practices, rather than through academic practices, as explained by Student #6: "*I don't study, I'll do homework sometimes…..I'm on my phone all the time, I mean all the time, keeping up with the latest everything. People are making so much money and getting discovered…. for being beautiful, and bold, and sexy.*"

Findings from this study also found that 50% of the students who participated in this study were aware of how their academic progress was impacted by the amount of time spent on makeup and media use at the expense of academic work.  The research showed that participant's academic motivation was negatively affected by their *off task* use of technology during class time.

 The research showed that there is a clear connection between media use, western beauty ideals, and their effects on the self-worth and academic performance of young ethnically diverse high school girls specifically by analyzing four common themes.

**Theme #1: Beauty and success**

This study found that high school has become a practicing ground for young girls wanting to improve their popularity by improving their "beauty". This goal was repeatedly expressed throughout the interviews from participants who confessed using school hours to apply or reapply their makeup.  The results show that participants from this study see beauty as a gateway to a better life, many referencing success and beauty with popular celebrities such as Beyoncé and Rihanna as role models. As best described by Student #7: *"I think it will be, is necessary to able to make yourself beautiful. It is important and it gets you things, like jobs, and friends that you might not get of your not. Make-up can boost your confidence and make you, like go for things you wouldn't if you think you're ugly or something."*  Even those participants

who viewed themselves or their mothers as being example of beauty did so based on their

external beauty.

**Theme #2:  Students devoted a significant amount of time applying make-up before and during school hours.**

The use of make-up is the main practice used by the students as a means for improving

their looks and achieving popularity and acceptance. The importance of make-up use was

expressed by participants as a "necessity."  Participants reported spending as much as three or

more hours per day applying or re-applying their makeup in an effort to look their best at all

times.  Social acceptance for these participants was critically important.  A typical comment was

made by Student #4: *"It takes me a long time because I want it to be perfect, so that I don't get*

*talked about."*

Social acceptance via physical beauty also included the hope for happiness and popularity

amongst peers, and especially amongst boys.  According to the majority of participants, future

happiness meant becoming accepted and popular with men in adulthood.  Student 5 reflected on

the importance of beauty: "I think about my mother, because she is always saying how important

it is, she married my father when she was young, he was older so he could take care of her, and

now he takes care of all of us. My mom doesn't have to work. She says it's because she took care

of her beauty, her face, and her body, that we and she has a good life."

**Theme #3:  Media influence on perceptions of beauty**

Media depictions, of western beauty ideals, are very particular and often exclude

ethnically diverse beauty as an alternative. When students are denied positive images that reflect

themselves it has a negative consequence on self-worth, particular for young girls. This was

evident as one student expressed feeling unattractive when comparing herself to a known

celebrity, who epitomizes the western beauty ideal. Student 5:*" ....I have a big nose and like dark spots and dark skin, and all short hair, but with make-up and hair extensions and stuff like that. I can change whenever I want and I'm accepted when I have on make-up and when I don't people are different, mean."*

The desire to mimic the ideal look requires time, dedication, and persistence, and is most often unattainable. Yet media messages insist that anyone can achieve happiness, love, acceptance, and even success with the "right look." This message adversely affects the importance students place on academics as a means of succeeding.

**Theme #4: Time devoted to studying vs. time devoted to media use**

Use of technology devices and media pressures to conform to western beauty ideals are adversely affecting students' academic progress, as students are using class time to view websites or applying makeup instead of focusing on academics. Homework and studying have become impacted by media use, as well. As Student #3 said: *"I don't do homework or study. My life is too crazy and busy, and my phone is my life, I live on it, it keeps me connected to everything...."* Echoing Student #3, Student #6 stated: *"I don't study, but I will do homework sometimes, if I feel like it. I'm on my phone all the time, I mean all the time, keeping up with the lasted everything."*

This result in students attempting to either spilt their attentions in class between academics and social networking, or not focusing on academics at all. The negative impact on participants' classwork, motivation, and reluctance to improve was best reflected in one response to the question of how participants felt about having failing grades: Student 5: *"I don't really care."*

**Comparison of Findings to the Literature**

This study supports the finding of several other research studies. Newsome (2011) found that advertised images of women and young girls with "perfect" bodies send the message that physical appearance is what is most valued in females in our society.  At the same time, young men are also viewing those images and receive the same message- that the value of females is based on physical appearance.

Mckay (2014) found that participants felt the need to wear makeup in order to hide flaws and meet western standards of femininity.  Mckay concluded that women's race and class play a major role in shaping how they experience beauty "ideals of Western cosmetic companies as one of the main determining factors in shaping women's experiences with their bodies.

Cheney (2010) examined how ethnically diverse women dealt with the messages of the dominant White society's obsession with thinness, and whether it affected their perceptions of an ideal body image. His study found that ethnically diverse women coming of age in American society experience anxieties and emotional stress as they relate to others in their daily lives.

According to Martin and Gentry (1997), advertising models are adversely affecting the way adolescents and pre-adolescent view themselves. The author concludes that many young girls develop issues with their self-esteem as a result, particularly if the motive is social comparison.

Owusu-Acheau and Larson (2015) confirmed that most of the respondents visit their social media sites using their phones and spend between thirty minutes to three hours per day. In addition, the study revealed that the use of social media sites had affected academic performance of the respondents negatively and that there was a direct relationship between the use of social media sites and academic performance.

Sana, Westin, and Cepeda (2012) examined the effects of in-class laptop use on student learning and found that participants who multitasked on a laptop during a lecture scored lower on a test compared to those who did not multitask, and participants who were in direct view of a multitasking peer scored lower on a test compared to those who were not. The results demonstrate that multitasking on a laptop poses a significant distraction to both users and fellow students and can be detrimental to comprehension of lecture content.

**Limitations in the Research**

There were several limitations with this study.  First, of course, was the small sample size of 11 participants.  Small sample sizes usually result in a lack of generalizability, and this is the case with this study as well.  A second limitation was the fact that only one high school was sampled, again limiting generalizability.  Third, the study was conducted using only participants from families at a low social-economic income level.  Finally, the study was based on self-reported data, and therefore subject to bias on part of the participants.

**Implications for Future Research**

There have been several studies published on the effects of western beauty ideals and practices on the self-worth, and physical health of young, impressionable girls.  The majority of these studies were conducted using university students and/or adult women.  The results of this research suggest that more research is needed to show the negative effects of western beauty ideals on high school girls, particularly to girls of color.

A second area of useful research would be how the use of media devices impacts on the academic achievement e.g. grade point averages; post-secondary access; career-choices of both male and female high school students.

**Overall Significance of the Study**

This study illustrated both the short and potential long term impact on the self-worth and education of young, ethnically diverse girls who are constantly accessing media sites that promote the ideal of western beauty, and which usually excludes images that reflect multiple ethnic ideals of beauty.  The study found that ethnically diverse high school girls believe that being beautiful, in and of itself, will automatically result in a successful and happy future.

Although long term impacts were not measured, the potential long term effects are alarming.  This study found a continual use of media has resulted in a negative impact on the time students spend on homework and studying.  Media time was found to be either greater than time spent on academic work, or had replaced academic work altogether.

**About the Author**

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