East Asian and Caucasian Body Image Experiences as Racial Majority and Racial Minority
Members

Teresa Yeh

University of Massachusetts Boston

August 2017

Advisor: Karen Ross

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor and mentor, Professor Karen Ross, for all her patience, feedback, encouragement, and above-and-beyond moral support and faith in me through this long process. I would also like to thank Professor David Matz for helping me realize the topic I wanted to pursue for my Master's Project, as well as all the other faculty and staff of the Conflict Resolution department for their knowledge, encouragement, and support. Great thanks also go to my external evaluator, Professor Leslie Wang, who was the teacher who first opened my mind to feminist thought and who I can directly thank today for being able to proudly claim I am indeed a feminist.

I'd further like to thank my dear family and friends, particularly my brother, dad, and mom, and also especially those friends who were able and willing to co-work with me when it just felt too hard to keep working on my own. This project definitely could not have been completed without you all!

And finally, I'd like to thank all the wonderful people who participated in my study, for your willingness to share yourselves with me with such vulnerability, candor, and thoughtfulness. Your experiences and stories meant far more to me than simple data for a project – I learned, grew, and gained so much through our interviews and conversations. Thank you all again, from the bottom of my heart, and I hope this paper can give some justice to the richness of your sharings!

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT

This exploratory pilot study used qualitative semi-structured interviews to explore how East Asian and Caucasian individuals who had lived as both a member of a racial majority and racial minority environment understood the development and impact of their body image on their lives. Analyses of interview data found that regarding body image investment, health and the desire for acceptance and connection were the foremost reasons cited as reasons to care for one's own image and for the appearance of others. The level of perceived control, perceived impact of changes to appearance on social goals and interactions, and how closely individuals felt their body image conformed to a cultural standard, impacted the level of importance participants gave to physical appearance in their lives. On the other hand, the type of environmental influence, participants' racial appearance, and their racial-cultural environment were the main factors that shaped participants' body image evaluations. I discuss the implications and possible interpretations of these themes in the final section, then identify potential areas for future research.

East Asian and Caucasian Body Image Experiences as Racial Majority and Racial Minority
Members

INTRODUCTION

For most of my academic life I have been passionately interested in researching and
thinking about topics related and within the fields of positive and Buddhist psychology such as
self-compassion, mindfulness, and social connectedness. For my Master's Project, however, I
decided to focus on a slightly different area: body image. Specifically, I investigated how East
Asian and Caucasian adults with substantial exposure to Western culture and had experienced
living in both environments where they were part of the racial majority and racial minority
experienced the development and impact of their body image on their lives. While this initially
seemed like a departure from my other interests, it also made total sense due to a conflux of
events that made my connection to these issues feel particularly alive.

The first and most compelling reason I felt drawn to this topic was due to my own
experiences with body image. As a self-identified woman of East Asian descent, I was born in
the United States where I was part of the racial minority before moving at age five to Japan, then
Taiwan, then China, where I lived until adulthood. Thus, the majority of my formative years
were spent in environments where I looked part of the racial and, usually, ethnic majority.
However, at eighteen I moved back to the U.S. and lived in a variety of states ranging from
Texas to Massachusetts to Arizona to Rhode Island, all of where I experienced myself as a racial
minority member. While I believe my racial identity and this diverse geographic background
influenced the nature of some of my body image disturbances, when I looked into this topic in an
effort to help better understand my experiences, I found very little literature that reflected the
nuances of my situation. However, in talking with friends, family members, and some other
peers as well as reading a few publically shared experiences of Asian-American personalities
such as Lisa Lee, I realized there were in fact many others who struggled with complicated body
image issues they felt were not as widely talked about in their mainstream culture.

For example, one Asian-American man in his 30s I talked to shared his frustrations of
feeling perceived as a "less than" as a romantic prospect when living in the U.S., always defined
by his Asian-ness, compared to his relief at being able to simply be "a man" when he lived as
part of the racial majority in Taiwan. A few Asian women I talked to shared experiences of

feeling targeted and objectified by men of other racial backgrounds, particularly white men, who they perceived to have the colloquially termed "yellow fever". These experiences also left them feeling less-than, not so much individual human beings but interchangeable imagined fantasies of an 'oriental woman'. On the other hand, some Asian women who did have healthy partnerships with men who happened to be white shared experiences of being accused by Asian men of turning their back on their race and internalizing the Western media's portrayal of Asian men as undesirable. Then there were just as many anecdotes from these Asian women of meeting Asian-American men who claimed to only date non-Asian women.

Beyond these issues of racial appearance were also stories of struggles with areas perhaps more commonly associated with the term body image, such as weight, height, and muscularity. Yet even these stories were told with nuances that differentiated them from the more popularly disseminated results of quantitative studies focused on Caucasian populations. For example, Lisa Lee, publisher of the Asian-American-focused *Hyphen* magazine, shared on the NPR podcast *Tell Me More* how she succumbed to what she felt to be the additional pressure for Asian women in particular to be "extra slender" and "fell into this rabbit hole… putting myself through all of these really crazy methods of losing weight" during a trip to Taiwan.[1] On the other hand, a white female friend once told me about her time studying abroad in Shanghai in college, where, while always considered petite in the United States, felt suddenly gigantic, awkward and "big-boned" in a sea of much smaller Chinese women. Her sharing reminded me of other stories I heard from white friends who shared similarly uncomfortable experiences of being racial minorities, a scenario I felt had not had as much opportunity to be explored in America where white people are the majority and viewed as a de facto privileged group.

In addition to these personal and anecdotal stories demonstrating a need for more research in this area, however, I also felt the issue of body image has become increasingly relevant in a day and age when a United States Republican presidential nominee forerunner and now sitting president Donald J. Trump is portrayed time and again on a 24-7 news cycle using sexist and objectifying language, for example calling the former teenage Miss Universe pageant

---

[1] Martin, Michael. "Asian-Americans and The Quest For Thin." *Tell Me More, NPR*, January 3, 2011. http://www.npr.org/2011/01/03/132628275/Asian-Americans-And-The-Quest-For-Thin

winner Alicia Machado "Miss Piggy" and shaming her for gaining weight.[2] A national poll by *The New York Times* found that a majority of teenage girls had heard these and other comments by President Trump, and almost half of them found the comments personally disturbing. For example, Morgan Lesh, a fifteen-year-old girl from the study, shared "[It] hits me hard when people like Trump say people who are skinnier than I am are too big. It makes me feel extremely insecure about myself."[3]

Other recent headline news such as "Secret Marines Facebook group is STILL sharing nude photos and videos of women despite NCIS investigation into the scandal" or "Harvard Cancels Rest of Men's Soccer Season Over Lewd Ratings of Female Players" also continue to make me all too aware that our society is most certainly not post-gender, and that women including and in addition to Asian women are still too often objectified in ways that can give rise to not only body image disturbances but also sexual harassment and assault.[4] The pressures and experiences of objectification are also not limited to just women. Men have also faced an uptick of media images that have become increasingly objectifying over the last 30 to 45 years, and studies have found that men are catching up with women on the likelihood of struggling with body image dissatisfaction and eating disorders.[5] Furthermore, as the National Eating Disorders Association adds, "Men can face a double stigma, for having a disorder characterized as feminine or gay and for seeking psychological help."[6]

Given all the above, I think it is both important and meaningful to spend time and effort investigating the body image experiences of both East Asian and Caucasian men and women who have lived as members of a racial majority and racial minority environment. Their unique background may yield insights and perspectives I do not feel are adequately explored and

---

[2] Barbaro, Michael, and Megan Twohey. "Shamed and Angry: Alicia Machado, a Miss Universe Mocked by Donald Trump." *The New York Times*, September 27, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/28/us/politics/alicia-machado-donald-trump.html

[3] Miller, Claire Cain. "'It Really Does Get Into Your Head.' The Election, Through the Eyes of Teenage Girls." *The New York Times*, November 4, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/05/upshot/it-really-does-get-into-your-head-the-election-through-the-eyes-of-teenage-girls.html?_r=0

[4] Al-Othman, Hannah. "Secret Marines Facebook group is STILL sharing nude photos and videos of women despite NCIS investigation into the scandal." *The Daily Mail*, March 9, 2017. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4296774/Marines-Facebook-group-sharing-nude-photos-women.html

Chokshi, Niraj. "Harvard Cancels Rest of Men's Soccer Season Over Lewd Ratings of Female Players." *The New York Times.* November 3, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/04/sports/harvard-mens-soccer-season-canceled.html

[5] Yam, Kimberly. "Eddie Huang Explains Why Talking About Male Body Image Issues Is So Tough." *HuffPost*. March 15, 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/eddie-huang-gq-male-body-image-issues_us_58c81c7de4b0428c7f138868

[6] Ibid.

represented in either academic literature or mainstream media. Thus, I decided to use the opportunity of my Master's Project to conduct the following exploratory pilot study to find and interview individuals with such backgrounds, and hope my efforts will start to bring more understanding to their experiences of body image and its perceived impact on their lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

How we look matters. Despite common cultural adages such as "you can't judge a book by its cover," study after study has found that most seeing humans inevitably make much longer and more influential judgements about each other based on physical appearance than we might think.[7] In fact, almost all of us are socialized from birth to form assumptions and judgements about people based on visual cues, where these assumptions can range from identities we assign them, like gender, race, and religion, to moral attributes such as trustworthiness, laziness, and kindheartedness.[8] Indeed, human minds are programmed to use a wide variety of cognitive shortcuts to help simplify, process, and identify relevant and important information from an otherwise overwhelmingly constant bombardment of sensory input[9]. While these shortcuts can be critical for efficiency and maintaining everyday function, they can also lead to overly simplified and erroneous beliefs that can act as the basis for many conflict-instigating phenomena such as stereotyping and Othering.[10] [11]

Furthermore, not only do we form influential impressions of each other based on physical appearance, sociological theories and supporting studies have demonstrated that how we imagine others perceive our physical appearance can also influence the way we see ourselves.[12] [13] This is significant because studies have demonstrated that the way people perceive and experience their bodies, or body images, are linked to a myriad of physical and mental health factors that can greatly impact quality of life and subjective well-being.[14] In addition, experiences of being

---

[7] Willis, Janine, and Alexander Todorov. "First Impressions: Making Up Your Mind After a 100-Ms Exposure to a Face." *Psychological Science (0956-7976)* 17, no. 7 (July 2006): 592-598.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Weiten, Wayne. *Psychology: Themes and variations (9th ed.).* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage. 2010, 339.

[10] Zebrowitz, Leslie A. "Physical Appearance as a Basis for Stereotyping." In *Foundation of Stereotypes and Stereotyping*, edited by C. Neil Macrae, Charles Stangor, Miles Hewstone. New York: Guilford Press; 1996. 79–120.

[11] Powell, John A., and Stephen Menendian. "The Problem of Othering: Towards Inclusiveness and Belonging." *Othering & Belonging: Expanding the Circle of Human Concern*, June 29, 2016. Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; UC Berkeley. http://www.otheringandbelonging.org/the-problem-of-othering/

[12] Yeung, King-To, and John Levi Martin. "The Looking Glass Self: An Empirical Test and Elaboration." *Social Forces* 81, no. 3 (March 2003): 843-879.

[13] Tajfel, Henri, and John C. Turner. "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior." In *Psychology of intergroup relations, 2nd Ed.,* edited by Stephen Worchel & William G. Austin. Chicago: Nelson-Hall; 1985. 7-24.

[14] Wilson, Rebecca E., Janet D. Latner, and Kentaro Hayashi. "More than just body weight: The role of body image in psychological and physical functioning." *Body Image* 10, no. 4 (September 2013): 644-647.

"Other-ed", stigmatized, or otherwise discriminated against can be internalized, and lead to body image disturbances that can become expressed into conflicts on multiple levels and forms.[15]

In the following pages, I will introduce theories and studies that demonstrate some of the effects of physical appearance on human behavior, how physical appearance is linked to body image, and how body image can shape and impact multiple facets of an individual's well-being including their experiences of conflict.

Physical Appearance

Definition

For the purposes of this study, I use the term physical appearance to refer to everything about an individual that is visually perceivable, from the features of the face and facial expressions to the shape and posture of the body, as well as any chosen adornments such as clothes, accessories, tattoos, or piercings.[16] I choose this inclusive, general definition as I believe all these aspects of appearance, from facial to body to sartorial appearance, all contribute to an overall impression that influence how we perceive and are perceived by each other.

Theories on the Impact of Physical Appearance on Social Perceptions and Social Interactions

Our physical appearance can have tremendous impact on how we are perceived and how we are treated. Studies have found that appearance-based judgements, correct or not, can impact a range of human behaviors from how likely we are to become friends with, help, date, hire, vote for, to even judging someone on trial as guilty.[17] Furthermore, the amount of information we can infer and assume based on snap judgments of physical appearance can be extensive. For example, in one study, a host of attributes such as likeability, competence, and aggressiveness were found to be formulated by participants even with only a 100 millisecond viewing of

---

[15] Deutsch, Morton. *The Resolution of Conflict: Constructive and Destructive Processes*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1973; 1-19.

[16] Jackson, Linda A. "Introduction." *Physical Appearance and Gender: Sociobiological and Sociocultural Perspectives.* New York: State University of New York Press. 1992; 7.

[17] Sinberg, Laura. "Think Looks Don't Matter? Think Again." *Forbes.com*, December 5, 2009. https://www.forbes.com/2009/12/05/appearance-work-pay-forbes-woman-leadership-body-weight.html
Todorov, Alexander, et al. "Inferences of Competence from Faces Predict Election Outcomes." *Science* 308, no. 5728 (June 2005): 1623-1626.
Efran, Michael G. "The effect of physical appearance on the judgment of guilt, interpersonal attraction, and severity of recommended punishment in a simulated jury task." *Journal of Research in Personality* 8, no. 1 (June 1974): 45-54.
Zebrowitz, Leslie A. *Reading Faces: Window to the Soul?* Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press; 1997.

strangers' photographs.[18] Additional experiments in the series found that extending the viewing time of those photographs only increased confidence levels of participants' ratings, but did not significantly change the ratings themselves.

There are many theories that seek to explain this phenomenon. For instance, the ecological theory of people perception suggests that the power of appearance-based cues to influence our perceptions and interactions is an evolved need to differentiate strangers, who can potentially be dangerous, from those familiar and known to be friendly.[19] Evolutionary psychologist Gerd Gigerenzer further explains that most people have to:

> *...make fast decisions under demanding circumstances with limited information. In most instances, [people] don't have the time, resources, or cognitive capacities to gather all the relevant information, consider all the possible options, calculate all the probabilities and risks, and then make the statistically optimal decision. Instead, they use quick and dirty heuristics that [work] well enough most of the time to be adaptive in the real world.*[20]

These "quick and dirty" heuristics, however, while efficient and adaptive, can also lead to overly simplified and outright erroneous assumptions that manifest as various cognitive biases and fallacies such as "overgeneralization effects", where conclusions are drawn about a group from an unrepresentative sample, and social stereotyping, a mental process of categorizing others, particular those who are outside of one's own experience, into groups and having overly simplified and often pejoratives beliefs about those individuals based on their perceived group belonging.[21]

While there are many aspects of people we can draw on to come to conclusions about them, in a book examining physical appearance as a basis for stereotyping, Zebrowitz observes that:

> *Most stereotyped groups can be differentiated by appearance. Ethnic and racial groups look different from one another, as do men and women, the elderly and the young. Some groups are stereotyped solely on the basis of their appearance – attractive people, obese*

---

[18] Willis, First Impressions, 592-598.

[19] Zebrowitz, Leslie A., and Joann Montepare. The Ecological Approach to Person Perception: Evolutionary Roots and Contemporary Offshoots. In *Evolution and Social Psychology* edited by Mark Schaller, Jeffry A. Simpson, Douglas T. Kenrick. New York: Psychology Press. 2006; 4.

[20] Weiten, *Psychology*, 339.

[21] Chandler, Amanda. "What is Stereotyping?" University of Florida Interactive Media Lab. 2002. http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Spring02/chandler/what-is-stereotyping-page.htm

people, short people, redheads. Even occupational and social groups may differ in their appearance, often by choice. Thus, the nerds and the jocks found in U.S. high schools are differentiated as much by their grooming and dress as by their traits and activities.[22]

Thus, physical appearance is arguably one of the most influential characteristics which people use to judge and categorize.

Studies on the Impact of Physical Appearance on Social Perceptions and Social Interactions

Many empirical studies support the above theory that cognitive heuristics such as overgeneralizing and social stereotyping impact social perceptions and social interactions. For example, studies into a "babyfaced overgeneralization effect" has found that certain facial characteristics of large eyes, small chins, and curved rather than angular faces are considered to be "babylike".[23] When participants in a study were shown images of such babyish versus mature faces and asked to rate them on a number of internal traits, results found that childlike characteristics such as greater social dependency, naivety, honesty, physical fragility, and warmth were attributed to individuals with the babylike facial features.[24]

This kind of social perception that elicits such strong trait expectations in perceivers can then influence social interactions with potentially significant consequences. For example, in a study on baby-faced children, parents were found to respond more leniently to their misdeeds and assign them less intellectually demanding tasks compared to their more mature looking peers.[25] Developmental psychologists argue that these kinds of attitudes and behaviors can lead to self-fulfilling prophecy effects, "whereby people with certain appearance qualities develop the traits that are expected," potentially impacting personality development across a life span.[26]

However, it should be noted that the impacts of these social perceptions and interactions are also complex, and my reviews of literature find the results are nuanced. For example, some researchers have demonstrated contrary consequences of the babyfaced effect, including one study which found "babyfaced young men were more likely to earn military awards,

---

[22] Zebrowitz, *Physical Appearance as a Basis for Stereotyping*, 79.

[23] Zebrowitz, Leslie A., and Joann M. Montepare. "Contributions of a babyface and a childlike voice to impressions of moving and talking faces." *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* 13, no. 3 (Fal 1989 1989): 189-203.

[24] Zebrowitz, Leslie A., and Joann M. Montepare. "Impressions of babyfaced individuals across the life span." *Developmental Psychology* 28, no. 6 (November 1992): 1143-1152.

[25] Zebrowitz, Leslie A., Kathleen A. Kendall-Tackett, and Jodie Fafel. "The influence of children's facial maturity on parental expectations and punishments." *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 52, no. 2 (October 1991): 221-238.

[26] Zebrowitz, Impressions of babyfaced individuals, 1143.

contradicting impressions of their submissiveness and physical weakness."[27] Such results suggest that instead of a self-fulfilling prophecy effect, when trait expectations are undesirable, such as in this case where childlike traits contradict cultural norms of masculinity, there could also be self-*defeating* prophecy effects "whereby babyfaced males counter the undesirable expectation that they will exhibit childlike traits by behaving in a contrary way."[28] This explanation is further supported by studies that have found that babyfaced women, who would not experience as much cultural conflict between childlike and stereotypically feminine traits, did not exhibit the same contradictory behavior, and in fact personalities of older babyfaced women were found to confirm the babyface stereotype.[29]

In another example of the way physical appearance can have significant impact on social interactions, studies have found evidence of a "familiar face overgeneralization" effect, where "faces of strangers who look more familiar are perceived as more likeable and trustworthy [independent] of attractiveness, smiling, and race."[30] In an example of "episodic familiarity", one study found that people avoided strangers whose faces resembled someone who had just treated them irritably.[31] Another study found a more general familiarity effect where participants demonstrated more trust toward others who resembled themselves.[32] This latter "similarity-attraction hypothesis" is an example of an unconscious bias Dr. Madan Pillutla, who studies trust and fairness in interpersonal interactions at the London Business School, argues contributes to hiring trends which perpetuate gender and racial inequalities in the workplace.[33] This can be problematic he explains, as studies have shown that businesses benefit from diversity, yet "if I

[27] Collins, Mary Ann, and Leslie A. Zebrowitz. "The Contributions of Appearance to Occupational Outcomes in Civilian and Military Settings." *Journal Of Applied Social Psychology* 25, no. 2 (January 16, 1995): 129-163.
[28] Zebrowitz, Leslie A., Carrie Andreoletti, Mary Ann Collins, Lee So Young, and Jeremy Blumenthal. "Bright, Bad, Babyfaced Boys: Appearance Stereotypes Do Not Always Yield Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Effects." *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 75, no. 5 (November 1998): 1300-1320.
[29] Zebrowitz, Leslie A., Mary Ann Collins, and Ranjana Dutta. "The relationship between appearance and personality across the life span." *Personality And Social Psychology Bulletin* 24, no. 7 (July 1998): 736-749.
[30] Zebrowitz, Leslie A., and Joann M. Montepare. "Social psychological face perception: Why appearance matters." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 3 (May 2008): 1497-1517.
[31] Lewicki, Pawel. "Nonconscious Biasing Effects of Single Instances on Subsequent Judgments." *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 48, no. 3 (March 1985): 563-574.
[32] DeBruine, Lisa M. "Facial resemblance enhances trust." *Proceedings. Biological Sciences* 269, no. 1498 (July 7, 2002): 1307-1312.
[33] Lebowitz, Shana. "3 unconscious biases that affect whether you get hired." *Business Insider*, July 17, 2015. http://www.businessinsider.com/unconscious-biases-in-hiring-decisions-2015-7

keep hiring people like myself, very soon I'll have an organization of people who think similarly, who act similarly."[34]

A third example of one of the most widely studied effects of physical appearance on behavior and attitudes is the "attractiveness halo", or the "what is beautiful is good" stereotype. In a pioneering study, Dion et al. (1972) showed participants photographs of unattractive and attractive people and had them rated for personality and other attributes. Results found that the attractive people tended to be perceived as being "more sensitive, kind, sociable, interesting, outgoing, poised, and exciting than less attractive people."[35] In a meta-analysis of studies on attractiveness, Feingold (1992) also found that attractive people were perceived as being "more sociable, dominant, sexually warm, mentally healthy, intelligent, and socially skilled than unattractive people."[36] In a more recent study using a cross-section of 480 adults in Taiwan, Luoh et al. (2009) found that when either an attractive or average server's photograph was presented along with either a favorable or unfavorable service scenario narrative, the more attractive servers were consistently rated as providing higher quality service than their unattractive peers.[37] Other studies have also found these positive biases towards attractive individuals begin at a young age. For example, even when researchers provided identical performance information attached to photographs of children to a set of grade school teachers, teachers rated the attractive children as more intelligent and popular.[38] Some studies have even found evidence of this halo effect on perceivers starting at a startling young age, with even infants demonstrating visual preference for faces rated as more attractive.[39]

However, a wider review of literature on the halo effect also find the forces driving the way it expresses in different contexts can be complex and nuanced. Wheeler & Kim (1997), for example, have found cultural variations in the presentation of the physical attractiveness stereotype. In comparing the attractiveness halo effect on 157 South Korean college students to a

---

[34] Phillips, Katherine W. "How Diversity Makes Us Smarter." *Scientific American*, Oct 1 2014. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/

[35] Dion, K, E Berscheid, and E Walster. "What is beautiful is good." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 24, no. 3 (December 1972): 285-290.

[36] Feingold, Alan. "Good-looking people are not what we think." *Psychological Bulletin* 111, no. 2 (1992): 304-341.

[37] Luoh, Hsiang-Fei, and Sheng-Hshiung Tsaur. "Physical attractiveness stereotypes and service quality in customer-server encounters." *Service Industries Journal* 29, no. 8 (August 2009): 1093-1104.

[38] Clifford, Margaret M., and Elaine Walster. "The Effect of Physical Attractiveness on Teacher Expectations." *Sociology of Education* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1973): 248-258.

[39] Kramer, Steven, Leslie A. Zebrowitz, Jean Paul San Giovanni, and Barbara Sherak. "Infants' preferences for attractiveness and babyfaceness." In *Studies in perception and action III* edited by B.G. Bardy, R.J. Bootsma, & Y. Guiard. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum Associates. 1995; 389-392

meta-analysis of literature on the stereotype in North America, they found that appearance cues leading to perceptions of greater moral integrity and concern for others created a stronger halo effect for Koreans versus Americans, with the reverse true for perceptions of assertiveness, dominance, and strength.[40] They argued these differences could be due to the greater cultural preference for assertive people in line with the individualist social goals of Americans, compared to a greater preference for trustworthy people in a more collectivist South Korean culture.

The above studies demonstrate that the impact of physical appearance on social perceptions and interactions is pervasive, complex, and nuanced. Culture, situational factors, historical events, and individual traits can all influence the social goals of perceivers in ways that impact their conscious and unconscious cognitive biases, social perceptions, and social interactions.[41] In the next section, I will define body image, explain how social-psychological theories help explain a relationship between physical appearance and body image, and why body image is a meaningful and important construct to study.[42]

Body Image

Defining Body Image

For the purposes of this study, body image is defined as the subjective perceptions and experiences of one's body, particularly one's physical appearance, including an evaluative component, meaning the evaluative thoughts and beliefs about one's body (i.e. body satisfaction/dissatisfaction and self-ideal discrepancies), and an investment component, referring to the beliefs and assumptions about the importance, meaning, and influence of one's physical appearance on one's life.[43]

A variety of sociological and social-psychological theories posit that this body image, or sense of self, is heavily informed and shaped by the way we imagine others perceive our physical appearance.[44]

---

[40] Wheeler, Ladd, and Youngmee Kim. "What is beautiful is culturally good: The physical attractiveness stereotype has different content in collectivistic cultures." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23, no. 8 (August 1997): 795-800.

[41] Zebrowitz and Montepare, The Ecological Approach, 11.

[42] Yeung and Martin, The Looking Glass Self, 843–879.

[43] Cash, Thomas F., Susan E. Melnyk, and Joshua I. Hrabosky. "The assessment of body image investment: An extensive revision of the appearance schemas inventory." *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 35, no. 3 (April 2004): 305-316.

[44] Yeung and Martin, The Looking Glass Self, 843–879.

The Looking Glass Theory

According to Charles Horton Cooley's "looking glass theory," the individual and society are not separate. Instead, one's sense of self and identity are inextricably tied to and shaped by our experienced social interactions. Cooley proposed a three step process, where 1) we imagine how we appear to others, 2) we then imagine and react to what we feel the judgement of those others' perception of that appearance must be, and 3) we develop a sense of self based on these perceived judgements of others.[45] While people can vary in how much they internalize others' imagined perceptions, as social animals, most will inevitably continue to be influenced and shaped on some level or another by those perceptions and interactions. As such, these then inevitably also influence the development of how each person views and experiences their own body, or body image.

Internalized Racism

Expanding on Cooley's theory, W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the first to examine the way in which having a socially constructed sense of self could result in a self-image that reflected prejudices held by others through his pioneering work examining the systematic discrimination faced by African-Americans.[46] He theorized that blacks in America saw themselves through the eyes of white Americans, the dominant race, and that there existed this "veil" of racism that came between the black self and others. [47] This veil of racism made it hard for white and black Americans to see each clearly and instead distorted their relationships through the institution of racism, and indeed, this racism was then internalized in the black individual. As he eloquently explained:

> *[African-Americans are] born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world in which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world… this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others.[48]*

There are many studies finding evidence of this internalized racism. In one example, an unpublished but landmark study cited by the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education case as evidence of the harmful effects of segregation on the esteem of blacks, 253 African American children

---

[45] Ibid.
[46] Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Barnes & Noble Classics. 2005; 372.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

were asked a series of questions by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark. The researchers found that the black children overwhelming identified lighter-skinned white dolls as the "nice doll" that they preferred to play with, while labeling colored dolls as "look[ing] bad."[49] In a more recent rendition of this study, a 2010 pilot study of 133 white and black schoolchildren led by child psychologist and leading child development researcher Dr. Margaret Beale Spencer for CNN found that "white children, as a whole, responded with a high rate of what researchers call 'white bias,' identifying the color of their own skin with positive attributes and darker skin with negative attributes…Even black children, as a whole, have some bias toward whiteness, [though] far less than white children."[50]

Objectification Theory

Just as individuals can internalize racist prejudices into themselves, the same has been proposed for sexism. Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts posited the objectification theory as a framework for understanding the "lived experiences and mental health risk of girls and women who encountered sexual objectification" that occurred when "a woman's sexual parts or functions [were] separated out from her person, reduced to status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her."[51]

Empirical studies support Fredrickson & Roberts' findings that sexual objectification is associated with increased risk of mental health problems such as eating disorders, depression, and sexual dysfunction.[52] Furthermore, internalized self-objectification, characterized by persistent body surveillance, is also associated with negative effects such as increased levels of body shame and anxiety related to phenomena such as discrepancies between self-image and a cultural standard, and fears about when and how one's body might be evaluated.[53]

However, while this theory was initially born out of mostly white women's experiences in the United States, studies have since expanded their focus to investigate the experiences of

---

[49] Clark, Kenneth B., and Mamie P. Clark. "Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children." In *Black Scholars on the Line: Race, Social Science, and American Thought in the Twentieth Century*, 415-428. n.p.: African American Intellectual Heritage Series. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2010/images/05/13/doll.study.1947.pdf

[50] Billante, Jill, and Chuck Hadad. "Study: White and black children biased toward lighter skin." CNN.com, May 14, 2010. http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/05/13/doll.study/index.html.

[51] Fredrickson, Barbara L., and Tomi-Ann Roberts. "Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (June 1997): 173-206.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Moradi, Bonnie, and Yu-Ping Huang. "Objectification Theory and Psychology of Women: A Decade of Advances and Future Directions." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (December 1, 2008): 377-398.

men, minorities, and individuals in other countries. Indeed, as American media has become increasingly saturated by objectifying images of men, studies have found increases in men's drive for muscularity and corresponding development of disorders such as muscle dysphoria.[54] More recent research has also found evidence that "the negative effects of surveillance on body dissatisfaction [may] be stronger for heavier and minority women because surveillance brings awareness of how they differ from the ubiquitous slender White ideals."[55] Other researchers have investigated the intersection of gender and sexual orientation and found it "compounds body dissatisfaction among gay men... since they are socialized as men and sexually objectified like women."[56] Finally, attention has also shifted to the experiences of objectification in non-Western countries, with one study for example finding correlations between higher levels of objectified body consciousness and risk for developing disordered eating in 3161 university-aged men and women in mainland China.[57]

Stereotype Threat

In addition to internalized racism and sexism, stereotype threat can also impact the level of importance and meaning individuals place on their appearance. This phenomenon is where members of a group experience pressure when they perceive themselves to be in situations where their behavior could confirm or deny their group lacks some valued ability or trait. [58] Stereotype threat is also complex, and can demonstrate interactions between different other- and self-perceived identities such as gender, race, and age on behavior.

In one example of a supporting study, Asian-American women were grouped into either a gender-salience or ethnicity-salience condition before taking a math test.[59] Researchers found

---

[54] Grieve, R, and A Helmick. "The influence of men's self-objectification on the drive for muscularity: self-esteem, body satisfaction and muscle dysmorphia." *International Journal of Men's Health* 7, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 288-298.

[55] Frederick, David A., Mackenzie C. Kelly, Janet D. Latner, Gaganjyot Sandhu, and Yuying Tsong. "Body image and face image in Asian American and white women: Examining associations with surveillance, construal of self, perfectionism, and sociocultural pressures." *Body Image* 16, (March 2016): 113-125.

[56] Wood, Mitchell J. "The Gay Male Gaze: Body Image Disturbance and Gender Oppression Among Gay Men." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services: Issues In Practice, Policy & Research* 17, no. 2 (2004): 47.

[57] Jackson, Todd, and Hong Chen. "Features of objectified body consciousness and sociocultural perspectives as risk factors for disordered eating among late-adolescent women and men." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 62, no. 4 (October 2015): 741-752.

[58] Aronson, Joshua, Diane M. Quinn, and Steven J. Spencer. "Stereotype threat and the academic underperformance of minorities and women." In *Prejudice: The target's perspective* edited by Janet K. Swim and Charles Stangor. Academic Press. May 1998.

[59] Cheryan, Sapna, and Galen V. Bodenhausen. "When Positive Stereotypes Threaten Intellectual Performance: The Psychological Hazards of 'Model Minority' Status." *Psychological Science (0956-7976)* 11, no. 5 (September 2000): 399.

that when participants were primed with their Asian identity, associated with the cultural stereotype of "good at math", they demonstrated increased performance. However, another group of participants primed with their identity as women, associated with the stereotype "bad at math", showed decreased performance. However, further studies also found more nuance in how stereotype threat could play out. A second study on the effects of the 'Asians are good at math' stereotype for example found that the public and private nature of stereotype-derived expectations also influenced in what direction performance turned.[60] Those researchers found that when Asian participants were reminded in *public* that Asians were supposed to be good at math, their performance also decreased. The impact of a public versus private prime have also been found in other demographics, for example with elderly participants primed with ageist expectations of cognitive decline responding with increased motivation to defy expectations and subsequent higher performance than a control group on cognitive tests.[61]

In addition, stereotype threat is not limited to minorities and marginalized populations. This is because "in theory, stereotype threat derives its power from a motive common to all individuals, regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and so on—the motive to sustain a self-image of goodness or competence and of being able to secure important outcomes."[62] Indeed, a study of Caucasian males primed with the thought that Asians were good at math also demonstrated decreased performance on a math test despite their identities as math majors at the prestigious Stanford university.[63]

Thus, body image, and the aspects of related identities that feel most salient at any point in time, can impact a range of internal attributes one might think unrelated to physical appearance such as intellectual ability. While an individual's skin color is simply a color, it can be given powerful meaning and story through that individual's imagined perceptions of how others perceive and interpret that color, such as by associating it with a particular racial group they identify with, and stereotypes associated with that group. Thus, going back to the "Looking

---

[60] Cheryan, Sapna, and Galen V. Bodenhausen. "When Positive Stereotypes Threaten Intellectual Performance: The Psychological Hazards of 'Model Minority' Status." *Psychological Science (0956-7976)* 11, no. 5 (September 2000): 399.
[61] Horton, Sean, J. Baker, and J. M. Deakin. "Stereotypes of aging: their effects on the health of seniors in North American society." *Educational Gerontology* 33, no. 12 (December 1, 2007): 1021-1035.
[62] Steele, Claude M. "The psychology of self-affirmation: Sustaining the integrity of the self." In *The self in social psychology*, 372-390. New York, NY, US: Psychology Press, 1999.
[63] Aronson, Joshua, Michael J. Lustina, Catherine Good, Kelli Keough, Claude M. Steele, and Joseph Brown. "When White men can't do math: Necessary and sufficient factors in stereotype threat." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 35, no. 1 (January 1999): 29-46.

Glass Theory", this individual first imagines how they appear to others, then imagine and react to what they feel the judgement of those others' perception of that appearance might be, then develop a sense of self that has behaviors and reactions influenced by an internalization of those judgements and perceptions.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory also offers additional explanations for the way people experience their physical appearance and its impact on their lives and behaviors. Henri Tajfel posited that people categorize themselves and others into social-identity based groups and engage in processes of social comparisons, causing the groups to become important sources of self-esteem.[64] Thus, in order to maintain positive self-image, people engage in often unconscious cognitive processes which seek to enhance the positive traits of groups they belong to, the "in-groups", while discriminating against groups they compare to, or "out-groups". Furthermore, since people's individual identities and self-esteem are influenced by their group identities, they want to belong to groups they perceive to be higher-status, since they feel their group identities impact their own status. Therefore, according to this theory, individuals from lower-status groups can respond in a number of different ways to social identity conflicts. Among these responses is that of "individual mobility", where:

> *…individuals leave, or dissociate themselves from their erstwhile group… This strategy usually implies attempts, on an individual basis, to achieve upward social mobility, to pass from a lower- to a higher-status group…The most important feature of individual mobility is that the low status of one's own group is not thereby changed: it is an individualist approach designed, at least in the short run, to achieve a personal, not a group solution. Thus individual mobility implies a disidentification with the erstwhile in-group.*[65]

According to studies, this strategy, in contrast to those such as "social creativity" and "social competition" that *do* seek to change the status of one's own group, tend to happen more when "objective and the subjective prohibitions to 'passing' are weak."[66] Thus, with the weaker barriers, "low status may tend, in conditions of unsatisfactory social identity, to promote the

---

[64] Tajfel and Turner, The Social Identity Theory, 19.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Tajfel and Turner, The Social Identity Theory, 20-21.

widespread adoption of individual mobility strategies, or at least initial attempts to make use of these strategies."[67] However, when the barriers to leaving one's group are strong, the other two strategies that *do* seek to change the group status itself are more likely to be chosen by group members.

However, among these different strategies, individual mobility is most relevant to understanding the potential impact of body image on human behavior. For example, in many places around the globe, lighter skin is associated for a different cultural-historical reasons with higher social status. Thus, a popularity of skin-bleaching among populations in West Africa and India for example, and the prevalence of skin-whitening creams and other such products in East Asia.[68] Those who are identified as one of the 'beautiful people' or more physically attractive in general, are also often perceived as having higher status in many social environments, thus a flourishing business of cosmetic and plastic surgeries meant to enhance appearance versus providing any other medical benefits. These skin-bleaching and lightening products and surgical tools are all examples of ways people can act on their body image to try and change perceived physical appearance barriers to leaving a lower-status group and "passing" into more desired, higher-status image-based groups. [69]

Othering

Finally, all of the above phenomenon can also be related to the process of Othering, a "set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities"[70]. Just as with stereotyping and social comparisons, physical appearance also cue many of the group identities associated with Othering such as religion, gender, race, ethnicity, class, disability, and sexual orientation.

Othering can occur on both the individual as well as group level. An example of an individual level experience might be a temporary and mild effect of feeling out of place and embarrassed for being dressed inappropriately for an occasion. On the other hand, there are also

---

[67] Ibid.

[68] Cooper, Helene. "Where Beauty Means Bleached Skin." *The New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2016.
https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/26/fashion/skin-bleaching-south-africa-women.html
Vaidyanathan, Rajini. "Has skin whitening in India gone too far?" *BBC News*, June 2, 2012.
http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18268914
McDougall, Andrew. "Asia's skin whitening market is often misunderstood." *Cosmetics Design Asia*, Feb 10, 2015.
http://www.cosmeticsdesign-asia.com/Market-Trends/Asia-s-skin-whitening-market-is-often-misunderstood

[69] Tajfel and Turner, The Social Identity Theory, 20-21.

[70] Powell and Menendian, The Problem of Othering, 8.

group-level Othering phenomena such as a widespread lack of belonging, safety, and inclusiveness for African-American men in America who are often Other-ed with labels of "dangerous" or "criminal", or Asian women who experience being sexually fetishized in romantic encounters with white men with "yellow fever".[71] These kinds of experiences can lead individuals to experience dissatisfaction with their body image, particularly those aspects of perceived appearance such as skin color or racial features they learn lead to being categorized by others into undesirable social groups that contribute to their experiences of being Other-ed. These appearance-based experiences of Othering can also cause levels of mental and physical suffering associated with body image dissatisfaction, which can also lead to appearance-modifying behaviors that can become extreme or unhealthy.

Thus, there are many theories that explore how physical appearance is related to body image. In the following section, I will lay out why body image as a related and separate construct from physical appearance is important.

Why Body Image is Important

Extensive studies have established strong evidence linking body image attitudes to psychosocial functioning, well-being, and physical and mental health quality of life levels[72]. Body image dissatisfaction, or the "disliking and disparaging of one's body"[73], for example has been found to correlate highly to increased risks for developing depressive symptoms, social anxiety, low self-esteem, unhealthy methods of regulating body-size, and life-threatening eating disorders[74]. In fact, while the 'obesity epidemic' has in recent years been promulgated as an urgent public health concern by international researchers and policymakers,[75] studies actually find that body image dissatisfaction plays a significant mediating role between body mass index (BMI) and physical health-related quality of life.[76] For example, one study found that Caucasian women, who placed more importance on a thin body ideal, appeared to experience

---

[71] Powell and Menendian, The Problem of Othering, 9.

[72] Cash, Thomas F., and Thomas Pruzinsky, Eds. *Body image: A handbook of theory, research, and clinical practice*. New York: Guilford Press. 2002.

[73] Wilson, Rebecca E., Janet D. Latner, and Kentaro Hayashi. "More than just body weight: The role of body image in psychological and physical functioning." *Body Image* 10, no. 4 (September 2013): 644.

[74] Bucchianeri, Michaela M., and Dianne Neumark-Sztainer. "Body dissatisfaction: An overlooked public health concern." *Journal of Public Mental Health* 13, no. 2 (2014): 65.

[75] Institute of Medicine. *Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation*, National Academies Press; Washington, DC. May 8, 2012.

[76] Wilson, More than just body weight, 644.

disproportionately negative health outcomes at lower body mass index (BMI) levels than black women, who demonstrated greater acceptance for larger body sizes.[77] Another study found current and ideal weight discrepancy, just one factor of body image dissatisfaction, could be more predictive of mental and physical health than BMI.[78]

Race, Gender, and Body Image: East Asian and Caucasian Men and Women

Research has also shown that a variety of factors beyond an individual's actual physical characteristics contribute to body image disturbances including developmental influences from cultural, familial, and interpersonal experiences.[79] For example, studies have found evidence that Asian American women may face particular sociocultural pressures that can contribute to poor body image, including an "Asian cultural emphases on thinness, family criticism of weight, and comparison to other Asian women."[80] Indeed, a large study conducted across 26 countries found evidence that "women in Asia desired bodies as thin or thinner than women in North America," and furthermore, studies of Asian American women living in regions with both large Asian as well as Caucasian populations reported lower evaluations of their appearance and lower body satisfaction as compared to Caucasians.[81] Frederick et al. (2016) posit that one explanation could be that "Asian cultural influences and appearance pressures are stronger in areas where Asian Americans comprise a significant proportion of the population."[82]

In addition to cultural pressures and racial appearance, body image researchers also consider the phenomenon "highly gendered [whereby] traditional gender ideals interplay closely

---

[77] Cash, Thomas F., Katharine A. Phillips, Melanie T. Santos, and Joshua I. Hrabosky. "Measuring 'negative body image': Validation of the Body Image Disturbance Questionnaire in a nonclinical population." *Body Image* 1, no. 4 (December 2004): 363-372.

[78] Muennig, P, et al. "I think therefore I am: perceived ideal weight as a determinant of health." *American Journal Of Public Health* 98, no. 3 (March 2008): 501-506.

[79] Cash, Thomas F., Tejal A. Jakatdar, and Emily Fleming Williams. "The Body Image Quality of Life Inventory: Further validation with college men and women." *Body Image* 1, no. 3 (September 2004): 279.

[80] Kawamura, Kathleen Y. "Asian American body images." In *Body image: A handbook of science, practice, and prevention (2nd Ed.)* edited by Thomas F. Cash & Linda Smolak. New York: Guilford Press. 2011; 229–236. Smart, Rebekah, and Yuying Tsong. "Weight, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating: Asian American women's perspectives." *Asian American Journal of Psychology* 5, no. 4 (December 2014): 344-352.

[81] Swami, Viren, David A. Frederick, Toivo Aavik, Lidia Alcalay, Jüri Allik, Donna Anderson, and Ivanka Zivcic-Becirevic, et al. "The attractive female body weight and female body dissatisfaction in 26 countries across 10 world regions: Results of the international body project I." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36, no. 3 (March 2010): 309-325. Frederick, David A., Mackenzie C. Kelly, Janet D. Latner, Gaganjyot Sandhu, and Yuying Tsong. "Body image and face image in Asian American and white women: Examining associations with surveillance, construal of self, perfectionism, and sociocultural pressures." *Body Image* 16, (March 2016): 113-125.

[82] Ibid.

with appearance ideals"[83] Thus, while both Asian-American and Caucasian women in studies have demonstrated more desire to match thin-ideals of femininity, studies have found men's body image ideals trend towards being larger and gaining muscle. Body image concerns and pursuit of muscularity among men have been found to be associated with health problems shared by women such as low self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders, however, body image disturbances in men are also associated with "muscle dysmorphia, and the use of steroids and other bodybuilding supplements such as ephedrine."[84] The barrage of media images and messages objectifying the male body and promoting such male appearance ideals start at a young age for men as well as women.[85] One study found almost half of a group of boys, 60% from Anglo-Caucasian backgrounds and 30% from Asian backgrounds enrolled in grade school in Australia as young as 8 to 11 engaged in some kind of muscle-building behaviors.[86]

Thus, clearly there are a myriad of physical and mental health factors associated with body image concerns, but how these factors present themselves can vary by gender and racial appearance. For all groups studied, however, the number of potential negative impacts of body image disturbance was significant. Furthermore, body image as a source of human suffering can also directly and indirectly lead to conflict, and as such can be identified as an underutilized variable in the conflict resolution field.

Conflict and Body Image

In the above sections I have touched on ways that physical appearance can contribute to simplified and erroneous assumptions and expectations on the parts of perceivers that can significantly impact the kinds of social perceptions and social interactions experienced by targets of such judgements. This next section will explore a definition of conflict before offering explicit examples of body image as an instigator, source, and factor in different forms and levels of conflict.

Defining conflict

---

[83] Tatangelo, Gemma L., and Lina A. Ricciardelli. "A qualitative study of preadolescent boys' and girls' body image: Gendered ideals and sociocultural influences." *Body Image* 10, no. 4 (September 2013): 591-598.

[84] Ricciardelli, Lina A., Marita P. McCabe, Jessica Lillis, and Kristina Thomas. "A Longitudinal Investigation of the Development of Weight and Muscle Concerns Among Preadolescent Boys." *Journal of Youth & Adolescence* 35, no. 2 (April 2006): 177-187.

[85] Farquhar, Jamie C., and Louise Wasylkiw. "Media images of men: Trends and consequences of body conceptualization." *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 8, no. 3 (July 2007): 145-160.

[86] Ricciardelli et al., A Longitudinal Investigation, 177.

According to Morton Deutsch, conflict:

…exists whenever incompatible activities occur. The incompatible actions may originate in one person, group, or nation; such conflicts are called intra*personal,* intra*group, or* intra*national. Or they may reflect incompatible actions of two or more persons, groups, or nations; such conflicts are called* inter*personal,* inter*group, or* inter*national. An action that is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes, injures, or in some way makes the latter less likely or less effective.*[87]

Unlike a dispute, conflict does not have to be manifest or even conscious to all or even any of the parties involved in order to exist[88]. In fact, in the context of body image, many experiences of conflict are often intrapersonal and "latent conflicts", which are those where "incompatible actions" of one party may be occurring but there is no explicit or external manifestation of conflict because recognition of these incompatibilities are "repressed, displaced, misattributed or [do] not yet exist psychologically."[89]

For example, in an illustration of a hypothetical intrapersonal conflict due to body image, there may be a woman who desires to be physically healthy, but has also internalized a cultural thin-ideal for feminine attractiveness and feels tremendous pressure to maintain a weight under what might be optimal for her biology. There can be mental and emotional energies expended on this conflict in her mind between her desire to eat for health and energy, and her desire to have body image satisfaction by maintaining or losing weight. Indeed, in a two-part study, researchers found that when two groups of men and women were asked to try on either a swimsuit or a sweater, women with higher levels of self-objectification who tried on the swimsuit had higher subsequent levels of body shame and restrained eating patterns. [90] In the second part of the study, participants were asked to take a math test. In this study, only the women in the swimsuit condition demonstrated diminished math performance. Thus, researchers concluded that trying on the swimsuit elicited higher levels of mental resources consumed by triggered self-objectification.

---

[87] Deutsch, Morton. *The Resolution of Conflict*. New Haven CT; Yale University Press, 1973; 10.

[88] Folberg, Jay, and Alison Taylor. *Mediation: A Comprehensive Guide to Resolving Conflicts Without Litigation.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 1984; 19.

[89] Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict*, 14.

[90] Fredrickson, Barbara L., Tomi-Ann Roberts, Stephanie M. Noll, Diane M. Quinn, and Jean M. Twenge. "'That swimsuit becomes you': Sex differences in self-objectification, restrained eating, and math performance." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 5 (November 1998): 269-284.

Body image can also be a main factor in latent conflict. Following up on the above example, a latent conflict can exist between women, for example, living in a patriarchal culture who experience unconscious conflicts between goals for health, well-being, and self-actualization, and social pressures to live within prescribed cultural norms for their gender. There may not necessarily be a perception of conflict or existence of disputes, however, until the less-privileged party, in this scenario the women and their allies, act to change the situation. When they do, as with the various waves of feminism and activism on the issues of gender equality and women's rights in the patriarchal societies of the United Kingdom and the United States, latent conflict can transform into conscious conflicts on multiple levels, including the interpersonal and intergroup.

Structural and Cultural Violence

The above examples also lead me to examine body image and conflict in the context of Johan Galtung's revised and expanded definitions of violence. According to Galtung, violence is present "when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations."[91] This definition allows for the concept of not only physical but also structural and cultural violence, where structural violence refers to discrimination and other such oppressive forces built into institutions and the systems of society, and cultural violence consists of "symbolic violence" that may not "kill or maim like direct violence or the violence built into the structure, [but can be] used to legitimize either or both, [such as] the theory of a *Herrenvolk,* or a superior race."[92]

In the context of body image, many sources of body image dissatisfaction and body image disturbances can arguably be derived from forces that can be conceptualized as structural and cultural violence. For example, it can be argued that the mainstream media and forces of advertising and capitalism drive an American society where sexual objectification of women and girls in particular for example are at this point a practically unavoidable source of cultural violence that can indirectly withhold "means of realization" for women to fulfill their potential as fully healthy members of society, for example as demonstrated by Fredrickson et al.'s study

---

[91] Galtung, Johan. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research,* 6, no. 3 (1969): 168.
[92] Ibid.
Galtung, Johan. "Cultural Violence." *Journal of Peace Research*, 27, no. 3 (Aug 1990): 291.

referred to earlier on the impact of internalized objectification on mental resources.[93] Many examples of structural violence can also be as conceived to be based on physical appearance, for example institutionalized discrimination based on skin color that makes it harder for African-Americans and other darker-skinned groups to achieve economic equality and have access to quality medical care, or society-wide lack of consideration and active prejudice practiced against obese individuals.

Thus, body image can be considered a central or instigating factor for various kinds and levels of conflict, from the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup, to latent and conscious conflict, to conflict in the forms of structural and cultural violence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, physical appearance is an important basis on which people often make assumptions and judgements about others and themselves. While this tendency has adaptive functions, it can also devolve into overly simplistic categorizing of people into stereotyped groups and one of an 'us' or a 'them'. The impacts of physical appearance on social perceptions and interactions can also significantly influence personality development over a lifespan, and impact the way individuals form their sense of selves and identities. The internalization of others' perceptions and expectations can then overtly and subtly influence the development of negative body images issues that are correlated to increased risk for physical and mental health problems.

As such, the following exploratory pilot study is meant to try and gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how East Asian and Caucasian adults who have lived a majority of their lives in a predominantly Western cultural environment and experienced being both a racial majority and racial minority member understand and experience their body image and its impact on their lives. My hope is that these findings will help inform the pursuit of further research and encourage the development of more culturally-tailored individual, group, and community-based intervention and prevention strategies to reduce body image dissatisfaction and promote positive body image.

---

[93] Galtung, Violence, 169.

METHODS

This study used qualitative semi-structured interviews to more deeply explore the subjective experiences and perceptions of East Asian and Caucasian adults regarding their body image development and its impact on their lives. Using word-of-mouth referrals and snowball sampling, I recruited sixteen adults who matched my target population before and during a five week visit to Taipei, Taiwan from December 2016 to January 2017. Fifteen participants were recruited via email referrals, and a sixteenth participant was recruited via Facebook messaging. All initial messages contained my IRB-approved recruitment text containing a brief introduction to me and my project, as well as a copy of a demographic information survey and informational consent sheet that I explained all participants would be requested to fill out and read should they volunteer to take part in my study (*documents attached in the Appendix*).

This study was approved by the University of Massachusetts Boston Institution Review Board (IRB).

The Participants

I looked for participants who fit the following criteria: 1) adults aged 25 and over and, due to the preponderance in existing literature of studies conducted with undergraduate students, who were specifically *not* such students at the time of my study, 2) self-identified as being of East Asian or Caucasian racial descent, 3) fluent in English, and had 4) lived for at least 8 years in a predominantly Western cultural environment (i.e. in a Western country or expatriate community in Taiwan), 5) lived for 3 or more years in both an environment where they were part of the racial majority and an environment where they were part of the racial minority, and finally, 6) were willing and able to provide consent to participate in my study.

I ended up having a relatively balanced sample of four East Asian men, four Caucasian men, five East Asian women, and three Caucasian women. Participants ranged in age from 27 to 68, with 87.5% of participants in their 30s, and four participants exactly 30 years old. Fourteen participants identified as heterosexual, while one identified as gay and another as bisexual. Between the 16 participants they had lived in a total of 15 different countries, with every participant having lived in at least one Western/Caucasian-majority country and one East Asian-

majority country. Calculated BMIs based on self-reported height and weight of participants ranged from 18.55 to 29.06 kg/m2 where 18.50-25.00 kg/m2 is considered normal.[94]

Table 1: Participant Demographics[95]

Participant Handle	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Race	Ethnicity	Country of Residence	Countries Lived In	Weight (kg)	Height (cm)	Calculated BMI (kg/m2) - normal 18.5-25	Occupation	Highest Education	Primary Language
David	34	M	Straight	Chinese	Chinese American	Taiwan	US, Taiwan, China, Japan	66 kg	172 cm	22.31	Musician	College	English
Hank	32	M	Straight	Asian	Chinese/Taiwanese	Taiwan	US, Taiwan	82 kg	180 cm	25.31 (overweight)	Consultant	MBA	English, Mandarin
Jason	33	M	Straight	Chinese	Asian-American	Taiwan	US, Taiwan, China	86 kg	180 cm	26.5 (overweight)	Filmmaker	College	English, Mandarin
Edward	68	M	Straight	Asian	Chinese	Taiwan	US, Taiwan, China, Japan	125 lb	162.5 cm	20.6	Retired	PhD	Chinese
Serena	38	F	Straight	Asian	Han (Chinese)	China	US, Taiwan, United Kingdom, China	56.7 kg	161 cm	25.08 (overweight)	Shoe company	MBA	Mandarin
Jessica	32	F	Straight	East Asian	Multi-cultural	Taiwan	US, Austria, Taiwan	53 kg	162 cm	20.2	Musician	Master's	Mandarin
Rory	27	F	Straight	Asian	Hong Kong Cantonese	Taiwan	Taiwan, Hong Kong, Australia, England	60 kg	154 cm	25.30 (overweight)	Translator, Copywriter, Graduate Student	College	English, Cantonese
Carol	30	F	Straight	Taiwanese	Taiwanese	Taiwan	US, Taiwan, Canada, Japan, Hong Kong	44 kg	154 cm	18.55	Business Operations Manager	College	English
Wendy	30	F	Straight	Asian	American Taiwanese	Taiwan	US, Taiwan	56.2 kg	157.5 cm	22.68	Recording Artist	College	English, Mandarin
Brandon	34	M	Straight	Arab/German/Italian/British	Latin American	Taiwan	Taiwan, China, Argentina	69.8 kg	173 cm	23.32	Musician	High School	Castillan
Mark	39	M	Straight	Caucasian	American	Taiwan	US, Taiwan	92.8 kg	186 cm	26.82 (overweight)	Creative Director	College	English
Jonathan	30	M	Straight	Caucasian	American	Taiwan	US, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong	70 kg	182 cm	21.13	Audio Engineer	College	English
Joseph	33	M	Gay	Caucasian	American	Taiwan	US, Taiwan	72 kg	176 cm	23.24	Medical Student	College	English
Jane	30	F	Straight	Caucasian	American	Taiwan	US, Taiwan, France, South Korea	63.5 kg	165 cm	23.3	Graduate Student	College	English
Patricia	39	F	Bisexual	White	White	Taiwan	US, Taiwan	58 kg	165 cm	21.3	Theater artist & educator	MFA	English, Taiwan Mandarin Chinese
Mary	31	F	Straight	Caucasian	Poilsh/German	USA	US, China, India, Phillipines, Japan, Switzerland	83 kg	169 cm	29.06 (overweight)	PhD Student	MSC	English

The Interviews

Given the limited research into the subjective body image experiences of my target demographic, I chose to utilize semi-structured interviews for my method of data collection. I felt this method would allow space for issues unanticipated by me and specifically relevant for my target population to emerge from the data based on their own experiences.

Depending on the participant's verbosity, willingness to share, expressiveness, and tendency to veer into tangents and stories, the recorded interviews ranged from a shortest of 37 minutes to longest of 123 minutes long, with all sixteen interviews averaging at about 63 minutes each. Thirteen interviews were conducted in-person at a location of participant choosing, with an additional three conducted via Skype for the participants who lived outside of Taipei (in Gaoxiong, Taiwan; Shanghai, China; and Portland, OR, USA). All interviews were conducted primarily in English, where seven participants used the occasional Mandarin phrase or term in their responses. Most of these were self-translated by participants back into English during the

---

[94] National Institutes for Health. "Calculate Your Body Mass Index." Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm

[95] All participants will be referred to in the following chapters using the pseudonyms listed in the "Participant Handle" column of this table.

interview, and the remaining Mandarin terms were translated by me during the transcription process. I also made sure to send a copy of any original Mandarin with my translations to participants during a member check process to ensure they felt my translation accurately reflected their original meaning. With participant's verbally granted informed consent, all interviews were audio recorded for the purposes of transcription.

All conducted interviews were organized according to a prepared interview protocol meant to address the overarching question of how East Asian and Caucasian individuals with substantial exposure to Western culture and had lived both as part of a racial majority and racial minority environment understood the development and impact of their body image on their lives. Despite allowing for tangents and a natural conversational back and forth, with each interview I made sure to at least touch on and cover five main topic domains. These domains were: 1) the development and significance of body image, 2) macro-level factors shaping development and significance of body image, 3) racial appearance, 4) impact of body image on life, and V) body image dissatisfaction coping and positive body image cultivation strategies. After going over the informational sheet and requesting verbal confirmation of consent to be interviewed and recorded, I began every interview with the lead-off question: *"How would you describe yourself?"* followed by *"How would you describe the way you look?"* With a few interviewees who requested clarification on the first question, I re-framed my question as: *"How would you describe yourself as a person?"* or *"How would your friends or family describe you?"*

Other examples of questions asked in some form of another during each interview included:

"Describe one of your first experiences noticing and linking your physical appearance to your sense of self."

"Do you think men/women/people should care about their physical appearance? Why or why not?"

"How would you feel/think if someone you know had noticeably put on weight?"

"Describe a time you felt your racial appearance impacted the way others treated you."

"How do you think your perception of your body has impacted your social life? Your approach to your social life?"

"If there have been times when you felt negatively impacted by your perception of your physical appearance, what did you do in response?"

All interviews were transcribed verbatim into Word Documents, then loaded into the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA12 for coding and analysis.

Coding and Analysis

During the interview and transcribing process, I kept a journal with my initial notes and reactions to interview content in a Word document. After each interview was transcribed, I then loaded that transcription into MAXQDA12 for coding. I first read through each interview from beginning to end and highlighted everything that jumped out at me. After doing so with all sixteen interviews, I then went back and began creating specific codes of topics in the first few transcripts which I used in subsequent transcripts. I allowed myself to create as many specific and general codes as I felt needed initially, with specific codes often being modified or added to based on new data in each interview. Some examples of specific codes I used included: "racial minority experiences" further broken down by race and gender, "body image development - formative experiences", "cultural messages on ideal attractiveness", "body vs. self-image alignment", "body image investment increasing/decreasing variables" and "perceived [race/gender] stereotypes".

Once I had gone through all sixteen interviews this way, I went back into my codes to identify, connect, and reorganize them into larger themes and patterns, as well as create new sub-categories where appropriate. I then used the MAXQDA12 software to pull and once again read through relevant interview transcription excerpts from all interviewees for each code to compare and contrast the experiences of my participants, and document not only the similarities and differences, but also, for this exploratory study, any unique experiences that seemed particularly interesting for future further study.

Positionality and Validation

Given my strong personal connection to the topic of my study, I was keenly aware that my own background, experiences, and perspectives would make me an inherently biased researcher. Furthermore, my identity as an East Asian woman likely impacted how each interviewee perceived me, and subsequently how and how much they may have felt willing to share with me on various interview topics.

The main methods I used to try and compensate for these biases was to work in collaboration with my thesis advisor in crafting my interview protocol, striving for questions

specific enough to elicit responses relevant to my study while also neutral and broadly-phrased enough to give participants space to bring up what felt most relevant for them. Furthermore, during the interviews I made sure to stress the confidential nature of each session, did my best in my role as researcher to present a curious but non-judgmental demeanor, and also verbally assured participants during the interviews that I was not there to judge anything they said. Finally, after my initial analysis of interview data, I also emailed a summary of key themes and patterns along with each interviewee's transcript excerpts I planned or potentially planned to use in my final write-up to each participant with a request for feedback. Twelve out of sixteen participants responded to my request, and these responses played a main role in helping me clarify and refine my interpretations and analyses. The results of those final analyses are presented below.

RESULTS

My interviews were structured and conducted to explore how the self-identified East Asian and Caucasian individuals who participated in my study understood the development and impact of their body image on their lives. In particular, as noted in my introduction and literature review above, I was interested in using these interviews to probe more deeply into the nuances of the experiences of individuals who had lived for substantial portions of their lives in both environments where they were part of the racial majority as well as the racial minority, as this was not an area I felt had been adequately covered by existing research.

Given the limited existing research, this study was exploratory in nature, and my interview questions and approach were meant to provide flexibility to both broadly survey as well as allow space for participants to bring up and more deeply consider any body image related issues they felt relevant to their experience. Analysis of results found overarching patterns in how participants experienced the development of their body image as well as how much and what kinds of experiences impacted the level of importance and meaning for their lives they placed on their physical appearance. Due to the limited sample size, there were also a few singular experiences described that were not thematic, but could be good starting data points to explore in more targeted ways in future studies.

The results from my interviews in this section are divided into two sections: I. Body Image Investment and II. Body Image Evaluation. These sections are further organized into sub-categories to provide a structure through which to compare and contrast the experiences described by participants.

Body Image Investment

As discussed above, body image investment refers to the beliefs and assumptions about the importance, meaning, and influence of one's physical appearance on one's life. [96] Analysis of interviewee answers regarding motivations to care for their physical appearance found two main factors: 1) health, and 2) the need for acceptance and connection. In addition, three main patterns came up in relation to the amount of meaning participants placed on their appearance's impact on their lives: 1) their perception of control, 2) their experience of perceived changes to body image on their quality of life, and 3) their perceived level of body image conformity to their cultural norm.

---

[96] Cash, The assessment of body image investment, 305.

Motivations to Care for Physical Appearance

Health

When asked about whether people in general should care about their physical appearance, or what motivated they themselves to take care of their physical appearance, the top reason that was universally cited by all sixteen participants was that of health. Ranging from emphasizing the importance of health over appearance and any concerns to "*look good*", to conceptualizing aspects of appearance as indicators of physical health, to linking those same aspects to what some participants found physically attractive, health was the top cited motivating factor to care about the physical appearance of themselves as well as the appearance of others.

First, all participants stressed the importance of bodily health over image in some way of another, whether expressed as motivation to take care of appearance for the self, friends and family, or an abstract 'other'. As Edward, a 68-year-old Chinese retiree living in Taiwan explained, he cultivated healthy habits in order to "*help [my] body to sustain [so] I can be here longer.*" When referring to his thoughts regarding the appearance of friends, David, a 34-year-old Asian-American musician living in Taiwan, shared how:

> *Some friends have gained a lot of weight, mainly because they started working, and I assume, stopped exercising as much. I would say my main thought when I see this is concern for their health, [and] my first thought it usually concern for their wellbeing, and whether they're taking care of their own body* (110).

Jonathan, a 30-year-old Caucasian music engineer living in Taiwan, also shared an aversive reaction to visually perceivable "*bad hygiene*", which for him:

> *… equals disease and then unhealthy means you're shortening your life… If you live unhealthily then later down the line it's going to start affecting your daily life and you're going to have a hard life and like I don't want that to happen to anybody* (115).

Rory, a 30-year-old Cantonese woman working as a translator in Taipei, similarly shared her perspective on the importance of health over image:

> *It's not about looking good, it is about health… Say if you have a massive tumor on your face then you need to get it sorted out. [If] say someone is obese, then it affects their health. Then of course they need to, you know, do something about it* (80).

For these four participants, health was directly emphasized as *more* important than appearance, even if in other parts of their interview they also brought up *additional* reasons why they cared for their physical appearance.

A few participants, however, also advocated the idea that some social pressure to maintain a standard of appearance-oriented body image could, in moderation, help lead to better health. As Jason, a 33-year-old Asian-American filmmaker living in Taipei, argued:

> *I feel like [if] you don't give a shit about [your] image, then that may also mean that you're not gonna take care of yourself, right?... I mean, I don't think that's very healthy either. 'Cuz then we're just gonna eat all we want [and] be obese.*

He further explained that this image of health needed to be balanced. While he thought obesity was unhealthy, society's *"insane, unreal image"* for physical appearance on the other end of the extreme was also unhealthy:

> *…like [if] I'm a girl, and I have to be so skinny, waist has to be so small, yet I have a big butt and I have like big boobs, which [unless] you go get surgery, most people don't have that kind of figure. And then [society tries] to sell that and say that everyone needs to look like this. It's ludicrous. Like that kind of image is [also] very unhealthy* (44).

Thus, Jason, who expressed valuing both his own and others' health, felt health and image were not mutually exclusive and in fact some social pressure to care for appearance was a necessarily force to motivate people, including himself, to care for his body in a way that benefited health.

Ten out of sixteen participants also directly or indirectly conceptualized physical appearance features as indicators of physical health to help explain why they felt people should care about not just health but physical appearance. As El, a 32-year-old Asian-American man working as a consultant in Taipei explained:

> *[I think] physical appearance is a symptom of your health. So, being fat, or having really bad skin, there's something wrong with you. So, there's something innate or inherent about your body that you should fix. [I] know [this] because I do a health check every year, and I can see how that actually is a problem"* (36).

Four participants also acknowledged that these visual cues of health were linked in their minds to what they found physically attractive. As Mark, a 39-year-old Caucasian man living in Taiwan explained:

[Whether people should care about their appearance] is a hard question because you
know [I] think people should care about their health of course. But health is also linked
to appearance... [I think] it's important for people to take care of their mental and
physical health, and by doing that they [will] naturally be more attractive (52).

David similarly shared, *"I think someone who looks more beautiful tends to - I think also*
feel they are healthier somehow. Yeah, healthier, which is a good thing" (148).

These interviewees who directly linked health and attractiveness together also
demonstrated a belief that caring for their health also directly helped increase or maintain
physical attractiveness. As Wendy shared:

I decided to just really start exercising… the more I exercised, the more confidence I
started to build… Just physically I felt a lot better, and people can see that. And I felt like
people were being more accepting of me being the way I am, being athletic… So, I am
definitely more accepting of myself… I think you can tell the difference too, because when
you exercise your skin actually becomes tighter. So, it's not like when you lose weight and
just become really sunken and stuff like that… I'm just so about health (44, 83).

However, in contrast to the trend among participants who felt their experience and
knowledge linked physical appearance to health, there were also participants who shared their
experiences that demonstrated the way appearance did not always reflect health. Jessica, a 32-
year-old East Asian woman working as a musician in Taipei, for example, shared "*I know*
although I look thin, it is not the healthy kind of thin. You know, like dancers they are thin but
they are fit" (321-323). She felt that she was not actually as healthy as she could be, yet by
society's standards because she looked thin and she felt she was perceived as being healthier
than someone who may be very fit but looked more overweight.

Overall, health was the most frequently, directly, and emphatically cited factor
motivating participants to care for their own as well as others' physical appearance, and for many
participants, visual cues of health were also linked to what they found physically attractive in
both themselves and in others.

Acceptance and Connection

The second reason that all sixteen participants cited in one form of another for caring
about their physical appearance fit under the umbrella category of need for acceptance and

connection. In my analysis of the interview data, this need showed up in three main ways: 1) the need to obtain or maintain access to social support, 2) the need to feel romantically desirable, and 3) the need to feel successful and accepted in order to reach professional goals.

1. *Desire to fit in*

The desire to either gain or maintain access to social support through changing physical appearance to conform to specific appearance standards and norms, or maintaining a self-perceived "*attractive*" appearance in order to continue to reap perceived social benefits, was a recurring pattern among almost all participants.

Nine out of the sixteen participants in fact directly recalled times in their life where they felt pain and fear of rejection and losing or not being able to gain social support and acceptance due to their body image. While some of those who struggled with aspects of appearance they felt they could not or did not want to control gradually came to cultivate an attitude of acceptance versus change those parts of their image, a few others recalled how the desire to fit in catalyzed changes to their behaviors around image. Rory, for example, shared that she felt she should have been born a boy, and in fact had been "*raised like a boy*" as a child. However, when her family sent her to an all-girls secondary boarding school in England as a young teenager, she said:

> *That was when I first realized, 'Oh maybe I should behave like a girl,' you know to maybe, you know, be more feminine... I think if I didn't fit in, it will be a real struggle [to] not have friends around. Especially in a foreign country and I was all by myself [living] in the boardinghouse… So I try to fit in so that, you know, people would accept me* (28-30).

David shared that for him, one of the first times he became aware of his physical appearance also had to do with a desire to fit in:

> *I started needing glasses quite young, and I was embarrassed to wear my glasses in class. [One time] the teacher gently asked me if I wanted to put on my glasses, and I did, and I distinctly remember feeling uncomfortable, [feeling] like the glasses made me look different. I just remembered that I didn't want to look different* (28-35).

Thus for David, he remembered how he had preferred to leave his glasses off and be unable to read the blackboard then to appear different from his peers and potentially feel embarrassed.

For Mary, a 31-year-old Caucasian woman living in Portland, OR at the time of the interview, however, fitting in physically didn't always feel like an option. When describing her teenage years living as a racial minority member in the predominantly Asian-populated Beijing, China, she shared:

> *It's all about fitting in, right? If you're in a group, and you're like a minority, and you see that the majority that maybe you wanna fit in with, you will never be like them - like, I will never be as small as say, the average person in Beijing. You get this feeling of like, there's nothing that I can do to ever fit into this group, and I will always be outside of it, and that can [be] demoralizing. Because there's just nothing you can do about it even if you lose weight. I think that's, part of the feeling of hopelessness, that you wanna fit into a group but that's never gonna happen* (50).

Mary's use of the words "*demoralizing*" and "*hopelessness*" helped demonstrate how important that desire to fit in felt, and how painful it thus felt when she felt that goal was out of her reach.

On the other end of the spectrum, some participants openly acknowledged that a self-perceived "*appealing*" or "*attractive*" appearance had given them social benefits. As Brandon, a 34-year-old Caucasian musician living in Taiwan, said:

> *I always [consider] myself to be very appealing to other people to interact with... a white kid with blue eye and blonde hair, [so] everybody was like, 'Oh, how cute this kid is.' [And] that made my life very easy. Very, very easy* (23).

These benefits then motivated participants who perceived themselves to have had these benefits to continue to take care of their appearance in order to maintain access to those social benefits. As Joseph, a gay Caucasian medical student living in Taiwan, explained:

> *I see our world...as a very shallow, physical appearance driven place... I consider myself good-looking... I realize [it's] helped me get jobs. I have a nice, friendly looking face, people trust me, and during college I went to Shanghai for an internship for two months... had not yet found a place to live... I kind of checked into the office and told them...and he kind of just looked me up and down and was like, 'You can stay with my family for a few months.' ... Part of it was definitely physical appearance. Being [in Taiwan], in my class there's one other white guy who's fairly overweight, and I often hear Taiwanese classmates talk about him and his weight. It just makes me aware that they see*

me in a different way because of physical appearance. It definitely helps if I want to hook up, date, meet friends (52).

Thus, for Joseph, directly perceiving "*the benefits of an attractive physical appearance*" was a strong motivator for him to "*try to spend an hour each day exercising, and take care of my body*" (54).

Others such as Jason also talked about some of the social benefits he felt a more attractive-than-average physical appearance had given him:

I feel like… a lot of relationships I have, it is because of my appearance… I mean, let's put it this way, I think if I was quote unquote, less attractive… I don't think I would have as many friends as I do now… I've been allotted a lot more opportunities because of my I guess image, per se, and I know that. And I'm very likable as a person, not just because of my personality, but I think also has to do with my looks as well… I'm easily more accepted by people because you know, [people] see that, 'Oh, you're a good looking guy,' and then, people want to be around good looking people (82).

Thus, from a position of both body image dissatisfaction as well as positive body image, interviewees described physical appearance as a power that could provide obstacles as well as help in accessing important social support in the form of friendships and even, in the example described by Joseph, significant instrumental help such as housing in a foreign country. The more impact a participant described experiencing of the power of appearance to limit or expand access to such social support in their life was then correlated to whether that interviewee also described feeling motivated to exercise, eat healthy, or dress and otherwise take care of their appearance not only for reasons of health but in order to access that social acceptance and connection.

2. *Romantic Desirability*

A second aspect of the need for acceptance and connection mentioned by fifteen out of the sixteen participants as something which not only made them aware of their body image, but also shaped how they experienced their images, was the desire to be attractive to the gender they found attractive. Even for Brandon, for example, who shared he felt he had an "*appealing*" physical appearance despite being a "*very chubby kid*", differentiated that "*appealing*"

appearance which he felt he had even when significantly overweight at 250 pounds, to feeling "*attractive*" after he started to lose weight. As he explained:

> *When I was overweight I wasn't feeling that my appearance was attractive… So when I lost the weight [like] I started to feel myself. Not appealing as I said before, but attractive. And hey, I look good. Hey, I should do this. I should try to look better. I should push myself a little bit to look better*" (47-48).

Hank similarly shared how "*One thing that always drives me to get in shape is my personal relationship status. Usually, right after a breakup I start working out. [I] watched my diet, no supper, always eating non-carbohydrates, and all those things*" (23).

For Joseph, a gay man, the standards of physical appearance he felt pressured to conform to
in order to feel sexually attractive were higher than simply obtaining a 'normal' weight. As he shared:

> *It was after… I started to come out and to meet gay friends, and there was definitely - let's call it the hookup gay culture - it's very much based on looks, and what excites you from what you see. And so, as I dipped my toes into that culture, it became very apparent if you didn't have perfectly chiseled abs, there were plenty of guys who would just block you and not give you a second thought* (20).

The above shared experiences are examples of how all eight male interviewees demonstrated motivation to exercise and eat a certain way in order to lose weight or obtain specific musculature at various points in their lives due to a desire to appear sexually attractive.

Seven out of eight women also described romantic desires as a big motivator to care about their appearance. For Rory, for example, while a big part of changing her gender appearance had been to gain social acceptance and friends, also became more aware of her appearance:

> *…especially when the hormones and everything kicked in and then… oh you will be conscious about how you look or how you behave and [the other girls are] talking about boys* (30).

Jessica also shared how she decided to grow out the short hair she had sported for most of her twenties due to media depictions of "*pretty girls*" with long hair, thinking doing so could help "*more guys [to] like me*" (249). Jane, a 30-year-old white woman raised in South Carolina

living in Taipei as a graduate student, also talked about social comparisons to others in the area of romantic desirability, saying:

> *After I'd already moved to Taiwan, I found out [my Taiwanese boyfriend had] a Taiwanese girlfriend. And [with] Facebook you can [look] at people, you know? [You] can look at the girl and it's like, what does she look like? Is she prettier than me? [Is] she skinner than me? Is she taller than me?"* (75).

Jane's considerations when comparing herself to this other woman helped demonstrate the way that romantic attachments and needs were part of what elicited her body image concerns.

Overall, analysis of data showed this need to feel romantically desirable was related to a deeper underlying need for acceptance, connection, and love. As Edward shared about his painful experience of feeling rejected by a girl for his height, his "*hurt and humiliation*" were directly related to the fear that "*I'm not worthy to be loved, that I may not get married… Nobody wants me*" (34).

However, not every participant described their need for acceptance in connection to their physical appearance in the form of romantic desirability. Patricia, for example, a 39-year-old married bisexual Caucasian woman working as a theater artist in Taiwan, did not mention romantic desirability as a motivating factor for her to take care of her appearance during her interview. What she did mention, however, was the desire for physical appearance-based acceptance to help her succeed in her work and professional life.

Desire for Work and Professional Success

Thus a final category under the umbrella need for acceptance and connection was in the area of work and career. For some participants, this desire was actually very much linked to a desire for social acceptance, given a more public nature to their work. As Wendy, a 30-year-old Taiwanese-American vocal artist living in Taipei explained:

> *You want to be accepted by the public, since you are in the public eye now. You want them to like you, you want them to vote for you, you want them to support you, which can further give you more opportunities in your career, which is what I wanted* (36).

For others, their increased awareness of body image was linked not only to feeling the

need for acceptance by their target audiences, but also bosses and those in their work environment generally in order to maintain access to the stability and for many, meaning and fulfillment, of a successful career.

For those like Wendy who did work in fields involving a broader public audience, however, body image concerns were very much elicited by the nature of their work. Patricia, for example, said as an actor she had an increased *"awareness [of] my body when I'm going to be on stage. And things like having to try on costumes"* (39). Brandon similarly shared situations that as a musician that made him more aware of his appearance such as *"[playing] on stage [when] I started to work more and more with high profile artists in the Mandarin scene..."* and having to *"give [people] our measures [because] they make clothes for the tours"* (11, 41). Similarly, David shared:

> *I'm a musician, so being on stage is one [reason to care about physical appearance]. Anytime I'm in the role of an artist, I might be seen either with my company, who's wanting to make me look good, or on stage, or in front of the media.*

However, as he further explained, caring about his appearance for work was not limited to public appearances, but also *"if I'm going to meet someone I feel is important, [like] my boss"* (24).

Indeed, caring about appearance for work was certainly not limited to those whose careers made them more public figures. When describing applying for Human Resource jobs in Hong Kong, for example, Rory described feeling:

> *…judge[d] from head to toe and then back up again [and] I think maybe I should wear a skirt instead of pants. Maybe I should wear heels instead of flats. You started to think, you know, did I do something wrong or did I put wrong pair of pants* (106).

While expressing this initial discomfort with the amount of focus on her appearance since, as she said, *"it's not like I'm going to model or I'm not going to be photographed by the press… I'm not people that is supposed to look good"* (108-109), she said eventually she did come around to her bosses' perspective:

> *If it's about work then you at least wear something that's not jeans. Preferably… wear skirts or heels. Then you put on makeup and you look bright and you're ready. You're not going to go to meet your clients with oily hair, in jeans or looking tacky… If we lose that*

deal because of me looking tacky then it's all my fault. So I can't afford to lose that deal

for example. So I will dress for the occasion (121-123).

On the other side of the equation, Serena, a Chinese shoe company executive described why she felt appearance mattered in the professional arena:

Say I'm meeting a new financial manager in a bank, you know, and if this financial

manager wears a say oversized suit and a trouser that doesn't fit and then their shirt's

not tucked in and hair not combed nicely… I would not trust someone who can't even take

good care of his uniform. I think for me that matters, and also another thing is in a

working space if someone wears a skirt that's too short or like cleavage is showing… I

will probably at first [think] that's not something I want in my office" (74).

Similarly, Jonathan differentiated between how he felt he dressed and appeared to others when he was in college compared to his current thirty-year-old self by saying:

So when I see those [college] kids that don't give an F, it's like I would think, I would

assume that they've never worked a day in their life or they might have worked at Kinkos

or like Home Depot or something. They haven't had like their business-business job.

Whereas like once you step into [the business] world it's just like it is the norm that you

dress nicer. It is unacceptable that you come work in that attire (224).

Overall, showing "*respect*" and giving indications of responsibility and attention to detail through the way people dressed themselves when it came to the work environment was a common reason participants cited as caring for their physical appearance. Furthermore, unlike the aspects of body image such as body shape and size that seemed most impacted by the motivation of romantic desirability, for example, the desire for professional success seemed to fuel more considerations and behavioral changes around the sartorial aspects of appearance.

Thus, the data clearly showed that the need for acceptance and connection showed up in these three forms of social support, romantic desirability, and professional success. However, though I broke these into separate categories, they were certainly not always mutually exclusive. Just as for Wendy her need for social acceptance was connected to her desire for work success, these three needs were often overlapping, or even in the case for some, at odds with each other. Indeed, a few participants described feeling body image pressure that contradicted each other from these different motivating parts of their lives. Hank, for example, shared that the kind of

body image he wanted to cultivate as a romantic prospect in Taiwan directly clashed with what he perceived would be most advantageous for him in the workplace. As he explained:

> *For me at least, what I observe in Taiwan is the social part and the work part are almost contradictory, where I think in the social part, I want to be a little bit thinner, I need to have young skin, clear skin with no wrinkles… you want to have black hair. But I actually think that in the workplace, at least for my line of work where I deal with CEOs and chairmen a lot, that actually serves as a disadvantage, because you don't want to look young, especially in Asian culture. People just don't trust you… Here, it's seniority first, and a lot of that comes from the appearance. So, I'm always actually battling between which way should I lean. To me, [if] I have to choose, I prefer looking good, looking young, having good skin, and then having a disadvantage in the work part, as opposed to fat, bald, and grey hair, and getting an advantage at the age of thirty-five* (36-37).

Thus, for a number of participants such as Hank, Jessica, Serena, Rory, and Wendy, there was demonstrated recognition of multiple forces shaping their desired ideal body image, where those ideals did not always align with each other. For these interviewees, a choice was often needed to determine which goals, such as health versus attractiveness versus professional advancement, were most important to them in relation to how they created and presented their image.

Factors Impacting Levels of Perceived Importance of Physical Appearance

In addition to reasons to care about physical appearance, analysis of interview data also revealed three interesting patterns in what seemed to impact the level of importance and meaning participants attached to their physical appearance. These factors included 1) perception of control, 2) the perceived impact or lack thereof from perceived changes to their appearance, and 3) how much their body image conformed to what they perceived to be the standard or cultural 'norm' of their social environment.

Perception of Control

One common theme that showed up in the data was that of control. When participants were asked about what aspects of physical appearance mattered to them, that they judged others on, or when talking about the impact they felt their physical appearance had on their life, the aspects of appearance they most commonly described spending time and energy on were those

they perceived themselves to have some degree of control over. For example, almost all participants talked about weight as a factor they actively thought about and took actions on. As Hank explained:

> *I don't think I can really control the way I look in terms of my bone structure, unless I do plastic surgery, and I don't want to do that. [And] I can't control my height, so of all the things I can actually control outside of plastic surgery, I think weight is really the only thing I think about* (77).

Mary also explained why she felt her body image dissatisfaction focused primarily on her weight:

> *It was all about weight [for me]. Like, my feet were big but it wasn't like, you can't control your foot size. [But], you can control your weight, [or] like I'm like well that's the thing I* should *be able to control* (30).

Edward, on the other hand, shared a more general lack of perceived control regarding being able to achieve a traditionally attractive masculine appearance: "*I never [felt] that good about my physical appearance because I [grew] up to think man should be tall and handsome, big eyes and all that, and I don't have that*" (47). He further explained however, that:

> *I can't change [those things]. So what good is it to think about? I have a lot of control over a lot of things, but I don't have control on this on, so let me work on other things. [Physical appearance], of course it's important. But it's only one part of [life]. I try to combine my total equation to be strong and competitive, and [physical appearance] is not a plus for me, so, okay, I want to work on the overall* (56-60).

For Rory, when asked why she chose to focus on changing her gender appearance as opposed to some other aspect of her appearance when she transitioned into a secondary boarding school in the UK from Hong Kong, explained that while "*being Asian*" also differentiated her from her peers, "*I can't change my racial appearance.*" Thus, her racial appearance was not something she considered spending time or energy even thinking about trying to change. Even when Jessica talked about growing out her hair as part of trying to change herself to become more romantically desirable, or starting to use more makeup after she turned thirty, other aspects of her appearance she described feeling dissatisfaction with such as her "*crooked legs*" she said she eventually started to simply accept because while it was something she could hide by wearing long pants and skirts, it wasn't something she could actually change.

Indeed, throughout the data there was a strong pattern of participants focusing on aspects of appearance they perceived to be more in their control such as weight, gender appearance, makeup, hair, and clothes. With the aspects of appearance interviewees felt dissatisfaction with but felt could not be changed, such as height, or would take extreme measures such as surgery to change, such as facial features, participants spoke of consciously choosing not to focus on those areas, or coming to terms with through acceptance or finding where they could feel a sense of control instead. For example, Carol, a 30-year-old East Asian woman working as a business operations manager in Taipei, shared:

> I don't think you have that much control [over your body] 'cuz you're born with it. I mean obviously you can do stuff, you can put on makeup [and] try to beautify yourself. But I feel like, a lot of things are just genetic… Like if you're [someone] that wants to lose weight, then they should try to eat less, right? I think you do have control… like you should try to take care of your body, but to the extent where you can, not like, 'oh, I want to be like six foot tall.' Like that's not gonna happen, right? So it's more like with what you have, how to make it the best (51).

For Mary, on the other hand, in addition to her focus on weight, also experienced never feeling able to fit in as a Caucasian girl growing up in Asia for eighteen years. Regarding this experience, she shared how her lack of control in this area had initially felt extremely hard:

> I think it is kind of a big deal people like us who are living in different countries growing up. You are always on the outside. You can't change your appearance. You can change your behavior maybe… but you can't always look like people here. So that part's completely out of your control and it's really hard to kind of accept that (89).

After having spent a substantial number of years as an adult as a racial majority member in the United States and Switzerland before going back to visit another Asian country where she was again in the position of a racial minority member, she found her perception of control and ability to accept that "*foreigner*" label had evolved:

> Whereas before [I] didn't feel like I really had like, I guess the power to fit in, but, now that I'm living - well I've lived outside of Asia for so long that, it's more like 'well it is in my control to fit in'… I feel like I have more control now. But let's say what I was going through - when I went to Japan, again there's this whole thing of like, you're a foreigner and you're automatically kind of like, outside of the system. And so, you see yourself as a

foreigner. And so I didn't really feel like I had to fit in in Japan, because I was just never

going to fit in… more and more I realized that it's like, up to me, and that I do have that

control…it's weird, if I went back to living [in China] now I'd have a really different

perspective I think (54).

Thus, it seemed that for most participants, the aspects of appearance that they most felt impacted their lives for better or worse were the aspects they felt they had some control over. For those parts of their appearance they did not feel they could change or control without taking what some perceived to be drastic measures, they then either minimized the importance of or over time developed acceptance for instead.

Impact of Perceived Changes

A second variable that seemed to shape how important interviewees felt certain aspects of appearance were in their lives were their perceptions of how changes to their appearance impacted their social interactions. Whether changes to appearance resulted in noticeable changes or in little to no changes seemed to either re-enforce or reduce the level of importance those individuals placed on those aspects of appearance respectively.

For example, Hank, who in his interview described weight as the most important aspect of his own as well as others' appearance that he judged people on, shared how his own experience supported his view that weight mattered:

When I first came back to Taiwan I was in quite good shape physically… women or girls

would approach me directly at bars, in clubs, etc. Now, that I've gained about 12

kilograms, that has changed quite a bit. I can sense that. So, I started to be more

aware…and I'm very conscious now, and I can see my weight being directly or inversely

correlated with the amount of attention or proactive-ness from the opposite gender (21).

Wendy however had quite a different experience. While weight was something she felt she could control, when she moved to Asia she realized it was her body type and proportions that actually created a sense of body image dissatisfaction. As she said:

I feel like I'm quite disproportional with my body. And I think… in the entertainment

industry, [the] standard is like [your] lower half of your body is supposed to be seventy

percent long, and then the upper body is supposed to be thirty percent long… I'm [also]

more wide on top than my hips, so I don't really fit like the 'standard beauty' in Asia (23-25).

This created a great deal of pain and desire to try and lose weight in order to change her body shape and gain more acceptance. However, after a time in her life when she did lose a significant amount of weight and even felt that *"anything I wore looked nice, I was showing my legs"*, she did not perceive it made the impact she had thought that weight loss would make. As she explained, *"I still wasn't satisfied, because my career still wasn't as smooth as I wanted it to be, so that's when I realized appearance is not that big of an issue (30)."* Thus, in contrast to Hank, for Wendy the *lack* of desired perceived change in her life after the change in weight helped her eventually become "*more accepting of myself*" and motivated her to want to become "*a healthy role model through fitness*" instead of focusing as much on fitting that "*entertainment standard*" of beauty (44).

Perceived Conformity to Appearance Norms

Another interesting pattern I noticed in my interviews was that those participants who perceived themselves to have a "*normal*" physical appearance tended to view their appearance as less impactful on their lives. As Carol explained:

> *I feel very blessed I don't have like, weird defaults. I feel like people that do, they, you know, I think like the world or whatever is pretty judgmental, so if you're like overly obese, or like overly something, or missing something, like I feel like, you do get judged, but, for me, I feel like, I'm not the most beautiful but I'm not the ugliest either, so I don't feel like, so I don't think people judge, just based on [my] looks* (49).

Serena also shared a similar sentiment, saying:

> *Personally I don't see [my physical appearance] has much impact on my life because I don't think I have a very, [I] have a very normal body. It's not extremely good or extremely bad. So I don't think it matters a lot* (88).

For Hank, while he did feel his physical appearance impacted his work and romantic life, when asked about how he felt he was perceived by friends and strangers, said he did not think his physical appearance mattered:

> *… because I don't think I've reached a point where I'm obese. I think it might change if I actually start weighing like 110 kilograms or a few hundred pounds plus. I'm not at that*

point yet… So, I think in terms of social [life], making friends, or with strangers, at least
I haven't felt any difference in that forum (74).

Thus, while some interviewees such as Rory or Mary experienced difficult relationships
with their body image when they felt unable to conform to a "*normal*" standard for appearance at
certain points of their lives, and others such as Joseph and Jason who felt an above-average
attractive appearances had given them social benefits, for participants who perceived themselves
as right in the middle of being neither too attractive or unattractive, there showed up a pattern of
perception that physical appearance had in fact little or no impact on their lives.

Body Image Evaluation

In contrast to body image investment which involves the meaning and level of
importance people place on their physical appearance, body image evaluation involves the actual
judgements and perceptions of their appearances[97]. In this study, three main factors showed up as
significantly shaping how people experienced the development of their body image: 1) the type
of environmental influence, 2) participants' racial appearance, and 3) participants racial-cultural
environment.

Type of Environmental Influence: Interpersonal, Mass Media, Social Media

When describing the kinds of experiences and pressures remembered as most impactful
on shaping their body image, all participants referred first and more frequently and emphatically
to in-person, real-life interactions. While many participants did also refer to the pressures of the
media and social-cultural expectations in creating ideal body images and body image
dissatisfaction, those influences were always brought up after *first* sharing formative
interpersonal interactions that seemed to come more readily to mind and hold more emotional
power.

For example, when David shared about influences he felt helped create body image
dissatisfaction, he referred first to real-life interactions, saying:

…the friends I made at [when living in Taiwan who] were much more focused on
appearance, particularly what kind of clothes you wore, and I didn't really have any of

---

[97] Cash, T. F., Melnyk, S. E., & Hrabosky, J. I. (2004). The assessment of body image investment: An extensive revision of the appearance schemas inventory. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, *35*(3), 305-316.

the cool kind of clothes at that time. So, I would say that was one of the main times when I started to feel not as cool (49).

Then, he did refer to his perception of how the media had also created a self-ideal discrepancy:

The ideal height for a guy, at least when I was growing up, always seemed to be six feet… and I think that probably does come from a lot of media, whether it be the heroes in movies are always some big, strong guy who's very tall, or any story you read the main character's almost always tall and relatively large, at least compared to the woman.

However, he finished his thought by again referring to real-life social comparisons, saying, *"but growing up in the states too, relatively people are bigger, especially compared to an Asian person"* (53). Thus, while he felt influenced by mass media, like other participants, he still referred both first and more frequently to real-life social interactions and social comparisons when sharing experiences he felt were influential in shaping his body image.

For other participants, the greater power of interpersonal interactions in shaping their body image was explicitly established. As Jason shared:

I definitely feel like the personal interactions [are] more real. [When] someone's in front of you, you know, [saying] something really you know negative about the way you look, you know, it's like if you're obese and [someone] drives by while you're walking and says 'hey, fat ass, go frickin' go on a diet'. That's a lot more powerful than watching a movie and someone making fun of fat person in the movie. 'Cuz you know it's not directed at you, [so] whatever they say, [it's] not 100% real, right? [Whereas] like is someone literally in front of you, and telling you that you're ugly, [or] whatever image issues they want to portray onto you, that feeling is real, [it] can breed fear [and] insecurity… [It's] a lot more powerful in my opinion than you know, walking over a billboard and seeing a hot, you know, tall Asian guy with big eyes, and then I'm like 'oh, I'm not him,' you know? [That's] more subconscious, [but] the feeling I should be impacted by someone directing something at you derogatory or whatever is a lot more powerful in my opinion (25).

Mary also found that particularly when living as a racial minority in Asia, real-life social comparisons were far more powerful for her than comparisons to any ideals fed to her by mainstream media:

When I was living in Beijing while growing up, [comparing myself] all came from just like, the people that I would see around me. That that was like, the main source, I was always comparing with what I considered to be 'normal'. And I think in a way that was worse because people are saying 'Oh well you know, those models [in magazines] are super-skinny, a normal person's not gonna look like that'. So you can almost kind of disregard that, but if you're looking at the average people around you and a normal average person is different from you, then you're gonna feel like, you're really not normal or average (52).

Thus while like Jason, in this example it was 'real-life' as opposed to media-portrayed people that felt most powerfully impactful on Mary' body image, in contrast to Jason, for Mary the impact came from a more internal action of comparing herself to those others, as opposed to remembering or experiencing interactions that directly commented on her differences or her image in the way Jason described.

In addition to describing the greater power of real-life social interactions and social comparisons, some participants even talked about actively fighting against the influence of the media, either consciously avoiding or curating the kinds of media they consumed or through a form of activism thinking. These participants held very negative views of mainstream media, with one interviewee Brandon describing it as "*honestly [one] of the worst things that human civilization has accomplished in the 20th century*" (119). Joseph, who was also "*very disgusted by much of pop culture,*" further shared:

I've done a lot to make that personally something I am not exposed to too often… for about ten years I haven't watched very much TV at all. I don't watch Netflix, [and] so I'm somewhat disconnected I think from what a lot of people are seeing, and I feel better for me for it. I think that's done a lot to help me be happy with who I am and what I am (78).

Patricia, who identified as a feminist and activist, not only described mainstream media as something she did not like, but also:

…a constant reminder [to] observe like [how] white people are portrayed in the media or people of color are not portrayed in the media, and along with that [notice] like when I'm being told by the media that weight is something that I need to be aware of – [media] for me is constantly reminding me that I need to keep fighting (61).

However, while traditional mass media showed up in the data as a secondary player compared to the power of in-person interactions and social comparisons, three interviewees directly and indirectly talked about social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube as distinctly new kinds of interaction they felt combined the pervasive power of traditional mass media with the personal power of interpersonal interactions. Thus, suddenly you could be bombarded by a curated procession of often digitally-enhanced images of people you have a personal connection to exerting influence on what you think you should look like or what people around you look like, as well as have access to a much more expanded world of social comparisons and opportunities for people to comment on you in direct and personal ways.

As Mark described his experience of the rise of social media:

You know this sort of pervasive media social media [grew] like wildfire, [with] people taking pictures everywhere and sharing pictures and there's just a lot more stimulus you get about image. [So] your only real exposure to it in the past was either magazines, traditional media print, TV, [but] Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, [your] friends are on these platforms to share photos… You see people sun tanning on the beach, you feel like I want to do that too. [These] platforms, their entire business model is based on connecting people and sharing experiences amongst the community that you connect with online. And you will get image-related content everywhere… People take selfies. We didn't even have this word three years ago, and now, you know, people talk about selfie buttons on their phones, there are selfie sticks. So this is like the ultimate tool to like document image, is a selfie stick (42-48).

Jane also described Facebook as having "*this insidious way of [making] you compare yourself with other people*", with a personal touch missing from comparing oneself with media images of models. As she explained:

… 'cuz Facebook you can, [you] can look at people you know? Like [if] you dated some guy, and you break up, and then later on you find out he's dating another girl, [you] can look at the girl and it's like, what does she look like? Is she prettier than me? Is she skinner than me? Is she taller than me? (75).

For Wendy, the world of social media gave an expanded platform for a great many more people to leave personal-feeling comments about her specifically that she did not get from traditional mass media as a public figure. As she shared, "*people online [would] leave comments*

like on YouTube videos or something like that. 'Oh, she's so fat, she looks so old'" (38). These, she shared, started to have an overwhelmingly negative impact on her self-esteem and body image even when in her real-life interactions her friends and family tried to counter those comments with positive messages of affirmations and acceptance for her appearance.

Racial Appearance

A few distinctly interesting patterns also emerged regarding participants' experiences of their racial appearance. First, Caucasians of both genders and Asian male interviewees described feeling greater impact from their racial appearance, whether positive or negative or a mix of both, when living as a racial *minority*. In contrast, however, Asian women interviewees did not describe feeling impacted by their racial appearance specifically, but did describe struggling more with body image dissatisfaction when they were part of the racial *majority* rather than the minority. Analysis of interview data found that most of the reasons for this increased body image dissatisfaction for Asian women in Asia were also to social-cultural characteristics of living in Asia that other demographics also described as contributing to increased self-consciousness of size and weight when living in Asia, regardless of other positive or negative effects or racial majority/minority member status.

Caucasian Minority Racial Appearance

While three East Asian interviewees described white minorities in Asia as one of perceived social privilege, all seven of the Caucasians participants of both genders who experienced living as racial minorities in Asia described a far more mixed impact of their racial appearance on their social interactions. Whether a certain kind of phenomenon was experienced as positive or negative also intersected with each participants' particular background and social goals when in Asia.

For two of the East Asian study participants, Caucasians were experienced as having a social advantage in Asia due to a perceived superior physical attractiveness. As Wendy shared:

> *I definitely think white people in Asia are more accepted, because [Asian people] just think they're like a whole new species... I have noticed some of the white guys here who might not be particularly 'handsome', to fit the American standards in the States, end up with super-hot Asian girls here... I just really think Asians here, in Asia, when they see a white person, a white female or male, they just think 'Wow, they're so beautiful.'... So, in*

general, I definitely think if I was a white person here, I definitely think people would be more curious to know me, and be more accepting of me, because they just think I'm a totally different species (86).

Indeed, most Caucasian participants did acknowledge how they felt their whiteness in Asia gave them certain advantages. As Brandon said of working as a Westerner musician in Asia:

I get paid because of the way I look many times…. The agent calls, 'We don't have a bass player for this thing.' 'Okay, Yato is free. Li Xue Wu is free.' 'No, but the client. You know how it is. The clients wants the Westerner.'… But they cannot play like this local cats. No matter what, they want a Westerner (81-86).

As Brandon further explains, this is very much a phenomenon of being hired purely based on appearance:

There's a Western guy who probably cannot even play, like compared to these local guys cannot do shit, but then he makes maybe in a weekend $500 USD working a total of six hours in several days just because he looks like a foreigner (87).

However, while acknowledging such examples of "*white privilege*", the white participants living as racial minorities in Asia overall described a far more nuanced and balanced experience. For example, while all three interviewed Caucasian women did recall experiences of being admired for their "*white*" skin color, such as Patricia's recollection of how "*[in Taiwan] like I could be having just the crappiest day with like having zits all over my face or something, an old woman without fail will be like, 'Your skin is so beautiful'*", in terms of size all three women felt far more self-conscious of their weight when in Asia. All three women recalled being called "肉肉的 [chubby]" by local Asians even when they felt their weight, by Western standards, would be considered average or even slim. As Patricia further shared:

I walk around [in Taiwan] and I'm this mountain woman, like I'm this like kind of a monster... Like there is that perception of Western women, like, 'Well, you don't have to be skinny because it's impossible for you to be as beautiful.'… There is that kind of feeling like, 'Oh, I could never be as lithe. I could never have the lines of an East Asian woman because I'm a white woman…' Your privilege is lies in other areas… but you don't have the privilege of having a nice body (101-102).

For Jane, who described an experience that resonated more with the above perception of white people in Asia, said that even as she was called "美女 [beautiful woman]" by local people constantly while living in Taiwan, felt, "*I know I'm okay looking, I know I'm like decently attractive, right? But like here, because of Caucasian, it's kind of like I'm put in a whole other category*" (17-19). Being considered almost universally "*beautiful*" in Taiwan to the point of being in a "*whole other category*", however, did not feel like it was about being considered sexually attractive. As she explained:

> *…maybe it's because I'm white, [but] I think that in Taiwan and in Korea at least, guys don't hit on me. So it makes me [less] aware of maybe like, my sexual attractiveness. Because no one acts like they're attracted to me here*" (30).

However, while for Patricia and Mary the sense as minority white women of being considered beautiful for their skin for example but not actually attractive to local men for their body type was described as a lack of "*privilege*" or source of body image dissatisfaction, for Jane, a history of sexual objectification and sexual assault in the West made her contrasting experience in Asia transformatively healing. As she shared:

> *When I moved to Korea, I had this amazing day. [I] was walking home from work, and I realized I wasn't afraid anymore. 'Cuz I think especially in France, but also in the US, like as a woman I'm afraid. [But] you know in Taipei and in Korea, you're safe! So that day [I] realized I didn't have to live in fear of some guy following me home or some guy stalking me. [It] was just like this amazing sigh of relief, and ever since then my relationship with my body [has] been much, much, much, much more positive* (39).

Yet, while this aspect of being considered 'other' was experienced positively by Jane, she, along with most other white participants, described being considered a perpetual "*foreigner*" due to racial appearance in Asia create difficulties in other parts of her life. For example, one of the most common experiences described by Caucasian participants upon arriving in Asia was being treated like a "*walking museum*" (Jonathan). All participants recalled experiences similar to Jonathan's from his time living in Xiamen:

> *It's like I'm like a white tiger… I would say at least twice a week people will approach me to ask me if they can have their picture taken with me, because they have only seen white people in the movies*" (133-135).

Jane shared she had even been referred to on medical documents when in the hospital for emergency surgery as simply "美國人 [The American]" instead of by either her English or her Chinese name. Even more than grappling with feeling treated like an exotic creature, however, was trying to find a sense of belonging when, for many participants, they had lived in Taipei for 6 or 7 or 14 years, and had made Taiwan their home.

Patricia, for example, who preferred to use the term "*immigrant*" versus expat to describe herself and was married to a Taiwanese woman, described how:

> …*regardless of your skin color or whatever to be able to just be an anonymous person, that is a privilege… And in such an acute way, like, we all feel it a little bit if we travel to a different country. But like* living *here, it's a different thing…. [East Asians are] privileged because they have the assumption of being local* (130-131).

Jane also shared:

> *In the US we're so much more used to diversity than in [Asia]. And so it's really hard when it's like, I've been living here for six years, I'm still sometimes like they'll be like '妳是哪裡人?* [Where are you from?]*' and I'll be like '美國人* [I'm American]*' and then you know, they'll talk, talk, talk about it, and then they're like, '好* [Okay]*, have a good trip!' Like, it's not a trip! I live here! Why do you think I speak Chinese? So it's very frustrating to not be accepted. But in Sarah[98], here's this [East Asian] person who, she can just fit seamlessly into a Western context, but then she can also fit seamlessly into this Taiwanese context, and it's so frustrating* (62).

On yet a further level, some participants actively described experiencing reverse discrimination. For example, Jonathan described how:

> *I was approached in the train, because like I was with like one of my friends who's a Taiwanese girl, and I guess like he thought we were together or something. And then he was just like, [all] this sort of stuff in Taiwanese and Mandarin, 'So you're coming into my country and you take like my country's girl, like who the fuck are you?'* (160).

Mark, who had lived in Taiwan for 14 years by the time of the interview, also described how racial stereotypes of white men by local Asians sometimes created unpleasant interactions in his daily life. As he shared:

---

[98] Pseudonym for an East Asian classmate from Jane's graduate program.

In the U.S. [my appearance didn't impact me] so much, because I was part of the majority. [In] Taiwan it's completely obvious. There's a huge difference in the way people look and perceive me... I can tell you countless stories of how people react based on my pure appearance… It does have a negative impression sometimes. I've had in the past people think that, you know, white guys in a bar is, it means player. I never acted like that in Taiwan… [But] I can give you an example of a doctor visit. I went to a urology. I had an infection. And the doctor asked me if I had many sexual partners. And I told the doctor 'No, I don't.' I didn't have many sexual partners. And the doctor said to me, 'Really.' In a way that was like he didn't believe me or something. And I just felt like what do you mean 'Really'? Yeah really. So there is some sort of weird stuff like that. Every visit to the hospital there's a story (28, 30).

Thus, while several of the East Asian interviewees described perceiving mainly positive benefits of a white racial minority appearance in Asia, the lived experience of the Caucasian participants in this study were more complex.

Asian Racial Appearance

The East Asian participants described a marked difference between the racial minority experiences of the men and the women, where most of the men very clearly demonstrated awareness and body image concerns around their racial appearance as minorities, but the women did not.

For the East Asian men, three out of the four interviewed described feeling far more aware of the impact of their racial appearance on their lives in a negative way when living as racial minorities in the United States. Two described experiencing explicitly racist behavior, while three described feeling disadvantaged by negative stereotypes about Asian men in American culture.

As Jason shared:

I think as an Asian kid growing up in America, there's obviously lots of insecurity. And for me you know I have small eyes, so that was always a source of insecurity, you know people calling you "chink" [and making] fun of you with the small eyes, do those gestures and whatnot. [In] a way you're made to believe that your eyes are too small, and they should be bigger (15).

David, who experienced a similar encounter as a child in the States, shared that in contrast, for him it was his father's reaction to the "*joke*" that made him aware of how he was different:

> *When I was in second or third grade, my friends taught me a joke about Asians. It actually was making fun of Asians, and you pull your eyes and stuff, and that's not what made me aware, though. What made me aware is, I went home thinking it was funny, and told it to my dad, who reacted very strongly, and told me to never make that joke again. So, his reaction actually made me aware that I was different* (70).

In addition to examples of explicit racism, however, David, Jason, and Hank all shared experiencing subtler but equally if not more oppressive negative stereotypes about Asian men when living in the States. As David shared, "*in the States I'm much more aware that I'm Asian, whereas here in Taiwan, because everybody is Asian, I don't [have to] think about it*" (35). David also shared how he noticed receiving less positive attention as a romantic prospect in the U.S., saying:

> *I feel most confident in Asian countries… Living [in Taiwan] the past seven years, I would say in general I always get the feeling that I'm considered to be quite attractive… I would say I feel the least attractive in the States, although some of that I think is more how I perceive myself [in the US]*" (85-89).

For Hank, in fact, the felt difference between living in the States compared to Asia was so big for him that he said the fact he "*never felt mainstream in the U.S.*" was "*probably why I moved home [to Taiwan]*" (66). As he further explained, "*When you're in America, people don't describe you as American, they call you Asian-American. [In Taiwan], I'm just Taiwanese*" (68).

Jason echoed the above sentiments, saying "*I do agree with the stereotype, that Asian men are [seen as] one of the least desirable.*" He also explained how he felt his experiences growing up as an Asian minority had internalized that belief into a lingering "*cultural sensitivity*" which he illustrated through a personal anecdote:

> *[A] long time ago, [I] was dating this white girl from work, [and] I thought it was funny 'cuz we went to a [in] one of these small towns and there were like all these white guys there. And here I am, an Asian dude, with an attractive Caucasian, [and] I actually felt like a little bit insecure, you know, like these guys are gonna try to get with her, and they're gonna out-alpha me, make me feel small…Yeah like when you're with a white*

person it's like as if you go into their world in a bar and they're just like oh, like I was being judged. Like, [you're] this Asian dude and you come to our little small town and be with this [white] woman. And uh, yeah, so I thought it was interesting how I felt when I walked in there with her, how I felt a little insecure. And I think that has a lot to do with the image issues (39).

However, in contrast to Hank and David, who spoke of how their experiences made them feel more comfortable living in Asia or even motivated their move back, Jason found his experiences drove him to:

…take it upon my own responsibility to combat that [stereotype]. So I think in a way that's why I am what people call sometimes a womanizer, in that, I want to [sweep] them off their feet, and be like, 'hey look, I'm Asian, and I can be charming too' (39).

This desire was not limited to the romantic stereotype, but also Jason's perception that the media perpetuates the myth that "*we Asians are not as superior as you, or we're shorter, [not] as athletic."* As he explained, *"[That's] why you know I'm very athletic and I play a lot of sports, and a lot of that was to [disprove] that*" (35).

Furthermore, while David and Hank spoke of their experiences moving to Asia after living in the States as simply being able to become just another man, in a sense, and not defined by their racial appearance, Jason and Edward actually spoke of a perceived ethnic difference where they felt part of a privileged ethnic minority versus simply another one of the racial majority when living in Taiwan. As Jason explained:

When [I] moved to Taiwan, it's actually the opposite, you know because you know I'm considered American-born Chinese… So, in a way I'm always looked upon like superior in a way, which I don't want to be, but because Taiwanese people really value American culture, and if you're American-born or whatever, here in Taiwan it also means that you're wealthy, 'cuz your family had enough money to send you to grow up in the States. So there's also a status thing… The way I walk, the way I dress, I don't even have to talk. They just know by my aura, and my image, maybe the way I dress too, that I'm not from Taiwan" (35).

Edward, interviewed at age 68, shared a similar perception to Jason of his experiences living in Taiwan, but in further contrast to all three other Asian men, also shared that for him

moving to the States as an adult and becoming a racial minority had only ever felt like a plus. As he explained:

> *I think in Bell Labs, if I'm not Asian, I would not have done as well, because they overcompensated for minority, at least when I was there in the 80s. They just did everything try to develop minority and try to promote them, and give them leadership position. So, I got a lot of opportunities, where if I was a white person, I would not have that chance* (132-134).

Not only which, because he grew up perceiving himself not as only as part of the racial majority but also an ethnic elite minority, when he moved to the States, he had this feeling that:

> *When I grew up I didn't know how to be discriminated. I discriminated others because I'm sort of like a* 外省人 [mainlander] *you know and at that time I can speak Mandarin more standard than the Taiwanese and I think somehow the Taiwanese got a little discriminated feeling. But I was on the other side, so I felt, grew up feeling I am in the elite side so I wasn't sure how, I don't know how to be discriminated* (41).

In contrast, however, the Asian women in my study did not tend to refer to their racial appearance as something they felt really impacted their sense of self or body image at all, whether they talked about their experiences as a racial majority or minority. As Carol shared:

> *I think the biggest difference was actually because I didn't grow up in the U.S., so they would talk about like TV shows, and it was like more a cultural difference rather than, I think, like looks. Like I couldn't like connect with them as well, because I grew up differently, watched different TV shows and stuff* (112).

For Jessica, the main negative impact she could think of from her racial appearance while living in Austria was "*[Asians] just generally look younger… So sometimes you don't get the respect you are supposed to get I guess, because they see you as a high school student or college students*" (148). However, she also explained that "*when I was in the States and also in Europe, I was a student. So sometimes maybe I subconsciously put myself into that status*" (158). Serena also shared, that for her, "*I don't think [my racial appearance has] ever been an issue in my life… Maybe because I was never had a bad experience of being a Chinese living in a Western society*" (57). Rory also explained that while she had experienced being bullied when she first moved to England for boarding school, she had felt it had more to do with her gender-non-conforming appearance. However:

> *… when I first moved to Australia, [people] didn't really care about the way that I dress or the way that I look… The people in Australia are more laid-back… I didn't hear much about, you know, the judgment on my appearance after I moved to Australia* (96).

However, while the Asian women did not describe much or any impact of their *racial* appearance on their lives whether as racial majority or minority members, almost all of them did describe feeling more body image dissatisfaction in general when they lived in Asia. As Rory described about moving back to Hong Kong from Australia as an adult:

> *I feel like, people are judging me again. People will look at me and think 'oh you're a little bit overweight'… I could feel that people were judging me and then I stopped going to the beach because I knew that I'll be judged and I do not want to put myself through this again* (104).

She also noticed how "*especially in Hong Kong and Taiwan I've seen a lot of the so-called promotions on you know plastic surgeries, [all] the plastic surgeons or clinics trying to promote you know liposuction and things like that*" (111).

Indeed, almost all of the Asian women described feeling more pressure to conform to a beauty ideal as well as higher levels of body image dissatisfaction around weight when they lived in Asia, and the increased dissatisfaction around weight was also shared by most other participants regardless of demographics as well.

Racial-Cultural Environment: Greater Body Dissatisfaction in Asia

Thus the third theme around body image evaluation that interviewees described was a pattern of increased awareness regarding size and weight when living in Asia compared to the West. For eleven out of sixteen participants, that awareness resulted in higher levels of body image dissatisfaction around weight specifically. Analysis of interview data found two main reasons for this phenomenon: 1) a perceived cultural difference in how East Asian people talk about physical appearance, and 2) social comparison to a much slimmer average-sized person in Asia compared to the West.

Body-Talk in Asia vs. the West

Ten out of sixteen participants brought up a perceived difference in how directly and frequently people in Asia talked about physical appearance, particularly aspects of appearance that could be perceived negatively, compared to Americans. As Patricia shared:

In the U.S. there's a lot more sensitivity about talking about weight, like you can't just be as freewheeling with your use of the term 'fat' or things like that. So I do kind of try to be a little bit more PC. [But] in Taiwan everybody is just like, 'Well, yeah, you're fat or you're not' (23).

Jane and Joseph both had similar observations, with Jane noticing how "*lots of people in Taiwan, they won't tell you you look thinner, but they'll tell you if you gained weight*" (107). Joseph further explained:

Asians, I think it means something different when they're like, 'Oh, he's fat. Oh, she's not very pretty.' Just more matter-of-factly. But that hurts me in a way that I don't think many Taiwanese understand. I remember, if I'd have acne or something, plenty of Taiwanese people would not be afraid to, 'Oh, you have a big zit on your forehead. You must not be sleeping well. Your face looks horrible.' It's kind of embarrassing, and I feel like in the U.S., I wouldn't point that out to people, because I think it would be embarrassing to many people (103-107).

This perceived cultural difference in how physical appearance was brought up in daily social interactions in Asia was noted as one factor that prompted higher levels of body image awareness and dissatisfaction by many participants.

Social Comparisons

In addition to the different approach to body talk, eleven of the sixteen interviewees also shared how the diversity of body sizes in America compared to a far slimmer average in Asia helped them to feel more accepting of their bodies when in the West. For example, as Wendy explained:

When I'm in the States, I'm considered petite and small. When [I've been] in Taiwan for maybe two years - and I go back [to the States], I forget, gosh, Americans really are big. In the States, I wear like a size two [and] I'm most of the time extra small. So, I didn't have any issues there. I just felt like everybody else. I was just normal, average. But in Taiwan, sometimes I would be a medium, [and] the girls here, their legs are just like toothpicks. That was just the way they were born. Maybe they want to gain weight and they can't. But yeah, in the State, I was more comfortable to show my legs, and I didn't have any issues with like guys being attracted to me (59-60).

Joseph shared a similar experience, saying:

When I go home to America, I feel much fitter, thinner than I do here in Taiwan. In Taiwan, I'm thinking often about my weight, and if I have more body fat than I want to have, just because the majority of Taiwanese men than I come in contact with are much thinner (15).

Mary also described how:

…being in Beijing, you know the average size there is a lot smaller than I'd say in Europe or North America. So just going to the store and buying clothes where you have to buy like a triple X just to get your size… I felt like a monster" (19-22).

Even Jane, who is often described by locals as "*beautiful*" when living in Asia, shared how:

I had a memory of going to a restaurant [in Korea], and this Korean guy, he was at the table beside ours, and he poked by stomach, and he was like, 'Haven't you eaten enough?' [But] I was tiny though! And so, I feel like when I'm in Asia, I feel very different about my body than when I go back to the U.S. 'Cuz when I go back to the U.S. I'm like, I'm tiny! I am thin! But then here, I feel very, you know, what my obstetrician told me, I'm 肉肉的 [chubby], *you know what I mean?* (19).

Indeed, whether or not they personally felt it impacted their body image or created body image dissatisfaction, an even larger majority of fifteen out of sixteen participants demonstrated awareness of this far thinner body shape standard in Asia. As Hank explained:

When I see somebody who is fat in the Asian culture, I almost immediately think, 'This person is not trustworthy, because this person is not taking care of himself/herself.' [I] think in the U.S. where we're talking about Caucasians, Latinos, there's a lot of people who are overweight, and so I think that's more of a norm for me. I don't think I really judge. Because in Asia, most people are relatively in good shape. It doesn't mean they're in good health, but they're in good shape. People who are grossly out of shape [in Taiwan], I always look at it like, 'Something's wrong with you. You're just not taking good care of yourself' (41-44).

Thus, across gender, sexual orientation, and race, social comparisons to a significantly smaller-sized average of people in Asia created more intense body image awareness and

dissatisfaction for most participants, particularly in contrast to their body image when in the States.

Further implications of the above results, limitations of this study, and suggested future directions will be discussed in the next section.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

As an exploratory pilot study, my hope is that this study might serve as a starting point to bring more attention and deeper thoughtfulness to the experiences and potential needs of an expanding population of bi- and multi-cultural individuals in an increasingly globalized world. With a small non-random sample of sixteen participants, fourteen in their thirties and fourteen identifying as heterosexual, the findings from this study give only a small glimpse into a depth and breadth of experiences shared by these particular East Asian and Caucasian interviewees, and limitations of this study are many. Thus, the purpose and capabilities of my project are to use the patterns, themes, and potentially significant singular experiences shared by these participants to generate hypotheses and questions for future research, versus make any generalizable conclusions in of themselves.

Limitations

Besides a relatively small sample size, all sixteen participants were found through word-of-mouth referrals and snowball sampling as opposed to a randomized method. Thirteen out of sixteen participants lived in Taipei, and fourteen in Taiwan, at the time of the interview, also heavily biasing the sample to individuals who had chosen to make Taiwan their home. Fourteen out of sixteen participants had also lived in the United States as their main non-Asian racial environment, thus further skewing results towards a very specific bicultural subset of individuals who had lived mainly in Taiwan and the United States.

Other potential limitations of my study were research biases. For example, the unexpected finding that health was universally cited first, most frequently, and comparatively emphatically as a reason to care about physical appearance led me to wonder how much the social desirability bias may have impacted the way interviewees responded to my questions. Given the personal and sensitive topic of body image, combined with a fairly pervasive cultural message that those who care about appearance are vain and judgmental, such as conveyed through popular Hollywood hits such as *Mean Girls*, I wondered whether health could be viewed as a socially acceptable reason for caring about physical appearance. This would be true not only for the self, but also perhaps especially when talking about caring about the appearance of others. Furthermore, given my visually perceivable identity as a relatively young East Asian woman, I

wondered whether interviewees may have consciously or unconsciously been influenced by sponsor bias based on where they suspected I stood regarding various interview topics discussed.

Finally, given my own experiences and personal connections to the questions of this study, I was also keenly aware of how other influences such as the confirmation bias might have not only influenced my coding and analyses, but also shaped how I formulated my interview protocol. While I did as much as I could to prepare for and control for these biases as summarized in my Methods section, it was not likely I was one hundred percent successful and thus study results should be read with these contexts in mind.

Implications

Still, despite the limitations, analyses of interview data revealed themes and patterns, as well as a few singular phenomena, that could guide future investigations into how East Asian and Caucasian individuals experience the development and impact of their body image on their lives. This following section will more deeply discuss the possible implications of some of those results in the approximate order in which they were presented in the previous chapter.

First, health and a desire for acceptance and connection were the two universally cited motivating factors my participants gave for caring for physical appearance, where the latter was broken down into the need to fit in, to feel romantically desirable, and the gain or maintain professional success.

As I referred to above in the limitations section, I speculated whether the role of health as the first, most frequently, and most emphatically referenced motivator to care for physical appearance could, even if unconsciously, partly be fueled by a belief that it was also the most socially acceptable reason for caring about image. Indeed, when Jane shared additional reasons she felt people should care about physical appearance beyond health, she prefaced her share with, "*You might not like this, I might say something that, this might offend you*" (79). She still went ahead and shared, but only after reassurance from me in my role as the interviewer that there would be no judgement from me whatever she said, and confidentiality was assured. This illustrated the way social desirability and sponsor bias may have influenced interviewee responses, however, including on the topic of why they felt people should care about image.

Something else that was interesting about these results was the way different motivators seemed more or less related to sartorial versus embodied aspects of body image, where the

motivation of professional goals had more interviewees referring to superficial layers of image such as clothes, as opposed to bodily aspects of image such as weight or skin texture. Even David's preoccupation with glasses in the context of the desire to fit in, which could be argued to be more sartorial as an object placed *on* the body versus *of* the body itself, was still something that, as a young child, he had less control over whether he incorporated into his image, since contact lens were not necessarily a choice he could make at that age. Of course, the difference between work-related and other motivators regarding appearance was not one hundred percent, with also significant overlaps such as Wendy's worry over weight and body type which related to her desires to fit in, feel secure in her attractiveness as a romantic partner in Taiwan, as well as her professional goals.

Next, the level of perceived control over different aspects of appearance, the impact of changes to appearance on social goals and interactions, and how closely individuals felt their body image conformed to their cultural standard also impacted the level of importance participants gave to physical appearance in their lives. These variables seemed to shape how much time and effort interviewees spent thinking and adjusting their behavior in order to achieve or maintain a positive body image and decrease body image dissatisfaction, and could also be interpreted to potentially have interactions with each other.

For example, the way the impact of appearance change and perceived control over appearance influence how important participants feel their appearance are in their lives could be theorized to be connected, as most aspects of appearance outside of perceived control such as height also do not easily change, if at all. However, aspects of appearance perceived to be more in personal control by participants such as weight, hair length, and makeup *can* and often do change, and thus likely have more chance of being either confirmed as impactful and meaningful, or dispelled as no longer important.

Furthermore, my analyses of data found that increased perception of control did not always seem to lead to a better relationship with body image. While a perceived lack of control over an area of body image for which there is dissatisfaction could create suffering, such as for Mary' struggle with her "*foreigner*" appearance while growing up as a white minority in Beijing, the feeling she and others such as Hank expressed that they "*should*" be able to control their weight seemed to sometimes lead to more preoccupation and continued dissatisfaction rather than developing an attitude of acceptance. Thus, it could be worthwhile to more deeply

investigate the variables that led participants such as Edward, Jessica, and Jason to describe successful experiences over time of cultivating more positive attitude on aspects of appearance they perceived not to be in their control such as height, crooked legs, and small eyes.

Finally, thinking about the way white people in America are conceived as having the privilege of being "colorless" could be a helpful way to think about why having a more normative body image seemed to decrease body image investment in participants such as Rory and Serena. Just as when white people say they "don't see color", having a "*normal*" body with "*no obvious defects*" could be conceptualized as a privilege of being perceived as 'normal' as opposed to 'less than' in any way. Being part of the majority and accepted "mainstream" in this way may also lessen the strength or number of people these participants may have encountered who held stereotypes associated with their societal-standard-conforming body.

The last section of results mainly discussed the three main factors found to have shaped participants' body image evaluations, which were: 1) the type of environmental influence, 2) participants' racial appearance, and 3) their racial-cultural environment.

Before diving into each individual factor, however, when considering participant demographics information along with where they fell into patterns of thinking and behaviors, a meta-theme emerged demonstrating that participants' visually perceivable social identities such as gender, race, and sexual orientation took a strong role in shaping how they experienced the development and impact of their body image. For example, interviewees sharing a particular racial or gender identity tended to report more similar experiences, such as white minorities in Asia feeling like perpetual tourists, no matter how long they had lived in one place or how well they spoke the language. Which social groups people identified with also shaped their perceptions of the experiences of those outside their groups. For example, non-white participants either had no opinion or demonstrated a relatively one-sided awareness of white minority experiences in Asia. The dominant narrative was one of "white privilege", a story of which most white interviewees were also aware. However, as analyses of interviews showed, the lived experiences of white minorities in Asia were far more complex, layered, and nuanced than perceived by those outside that demographic. Furthermore, consistent with previous literature, though there was only one participant who identified as a gay white man, the experiences Joseph described contrasted as expected to those of the straight white men and women, and also demonstrated the intersecting influences of sexual orientation on top of gender and race.

This evidence of distinct experiences as well as a lack of those experiences being shared by non-group members made sense, since what one does not personally experience is less likely to be learned without motivation or access to opportunities for learning. However, I believe these discrepancies in perspectives likely also provide a basis for misunderstandings, miscommunication, and conflict. Given the theory and studies cited in my literature review which provide evidence that body image is not only self-created but influenced by how we think others perceive us, finding more ways for people to better understand how not only *they* feel impacted by their appearance but how others experience the world seems like it could be useful in minimizing suffering and disconnection arising from lack of this understanding.

Furthermore, besides gender, race, and sexuality, I also found it very interesting that among the Asian men, the one man who was significantly older than the rest was also the one who had a most outlier experience of being a racial minority in the United States. My guess is that the different timeline in which he experienced the U.S. likely impacted the environment he was in as a minority, and thus it would be hard to determine whether it was something about the participant himself, his age at the time of the interview, or something to do with the era in which he immigrated to America that created such a different and positive experience for him as an East Asian minority. Of course, these kinds of cofounding variable considerations could also realistically be expanded to include all the participants of the study, since the small sample size and relative breadth of backgrounds means each participant can still be argued to have all had very diverse histories, even those who were closer together in age.

This issue of age and time is also interesting when discussing the type of environmental influence, however, particularly the way people thought about media. For example, it seems possible that younger participants had more exposure to social media as their main form of media during larger portions of their lives compared to older participants like Edward, who did not once mention social media platforms when discussing this topic.

The impact on body image of the racial-cultural environment a participant was in was also a big theme that emerged from the data. In fact, while my participants talked about many issues generally relatable to most people who think about body image such as weight, aging, or wanting to fit in, in the process of conducting my interviews with this bi- and multi-cultural population, I was very quickly confronted with interviewees who would ask me for clarification regarding my first leading question: when you ask me "How would I describe myself", do you

mean how I would describe myself in Asia, or in the West? This was not a distinction I had thought about prior to starting my interviews, but I very quickly realized it was a distinction that seemed almost necessary for my participants to feel they could even begin to formulate a response to my question. As such, I began to follow up on this distinction in all remaining subsequent interviews, even if the participant did not bring it up themselves first. However, thirteen out of sixteen participants either asked about or qualified their answers based on what culture or country they were trying to describe themselves in without my prompting. This phenomenon I interpret as providing evidence to just how important social comparisons can be shaping individual's body images. Thus, as described by Cooley's "Looking Glass Theory", what interviewees saw around them, what country they were in, and how they imagined people around them perceived them could all have such a big impact on their body image that the way they described themselves needed to be qualified first by in which racial-cultural environment they were imagining themselves.

Another interesting inference that could be drawn from the patterns in the topic of racial-cultural environment was that part of the reason more participants reported greater consciousness and dissatisfaction with body image while in Asia was due not only to a thinner body size average, but the general greater homogeneity. In fact, several participants such as Jane, Hank, or Wendy referred to the comparative diversity of the United States, not only of body size, but also race and culture. The relative homogeneity found in most of Asia could thus also be linked to the difficulty non-Asians immigrants experienced to feeling like legitimate residents versus eternal expats, foreigners, and tourists. This could also be interesting to think about in terms of the implications of the kinds of social conflict that could be encountered in a more homogenous society versus more diverse environments such as the States.

Finally, experiences shared in the interviews also clearly revealed a connection between body image and conflict. Jonathan's sharing of being accosted on the train, for example, demonstrated an appearance-fueled interpersonal conflict that could also be interpreted to represent a larger intergroup conflict dynamic between local Taiwanese and white foreigners, particularly white men. Mark's experiences also demonstrated his encounters with a pervasive negative stereotype of white men as being sexually promiscuous, and which can feed into a larger conflict story of white men who come to Asia to "get" Asian girls. These experiences resonate with many of the pre-study anecdotes I had heard from individuals who had also

traveled to or lived in Taiwan, and can be conceptualized as a form of Othering of white men in Taiwan that impose stereotypes on them which strip away some of their unique complexity as individual human beings.

Future Directions

Despite limitations, analyses of data also revealed a few singular experiences that could be interesting starting points for future research. For example, the experience of living as a "beautiful" yet not "*sexually* attractive" Caucasian woman in Asia clearly had healing effects for Jane, who moved there with a history of multiple incidents of sexual assault as well as frequent experiences of sexual objectification while living in the West. Given the empirical studies finding significant proportions of women and girls in the U.S. having or will having had experienced in their lifetime sexual assault and sexual objectification, further research into the active factors that create the sense of safety and healing Jane felt when she moved to Korea may have useful implications for those with similar histories. Interviewing and/or surveying larger samples of women like Jane about the ways they perceive themselves treated by Asians in Korea and Taiwan could help identify some of the active factors that can help generate ideas for cultural-social shifts that can be targeted in gender relations through public education or changes in public policy, or factors to consider when creating healing centers for survivors of sexual assault or those with underlying issues related to sexual objectification.

Second, Edward's description of the buffering effect of his experience growing up as a racial majority member *and* elite ethnic minority as well as Mary' marked positive shift from growing up as a racial minority to living as a racial majority suggest that there are certain qualities inherent in being part of a racial majority environment that may be helpful for some people. Studies helping to further identify the variables responsible for creating resilience in individuals such as Edward and increasing a sense of control for Mary may be helpful to figure out more ways to better provide those qualities to those experiencing difficulties living as racial minorities.

Further areas of research to follow up on this study also include interviewing a larger and more randomized sample with additional methods to triangulate findings such as focus groups and surveys. Studies can also be constructed and tailored to focus solely on more specific subsets

of the population, such as Caucasian women of a certain age range living in Asia with both racial minority and racial majority experiences.

Finally, in addition to focusing on larger, more representative, or more specific populations, researchers can also investigate additional questions such as what factors tend to help individuals accept or otherwise come to terms with aspects of image that create dissatisfaction such as height or racial appearance that they can't change. Learning from these factors may have implications on how individuals can help mitigate suffering for those who *do* continue to struggle with dissatisfaction from such out-of-personal-control appearance aspects.

In conclusion, globalization is leading to an increasing number of individuals who are growing up and/or living in multiple countries in their lifetime, and the way that impacts how they view themselves is something we should consider when thinking about how we can be more inclusive, whether in the kind of research undertaken, or how providers of services can consider these cultural backgrounds when addressing issues such as counseling for body image or crafting policy or education programs. Furthermore, feedback from participants of this study found that many appreciated a chance to share their stories, with one interviewee saying in response to a member check email, "*I really like the parts you picked out from the interview, those experiences mean a lot to me. I am so happy that what I said was helpful. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to just say what I wanted to say, I really appreciate it!*" Thus, research is also an avenue for many who may not otherwise feel they are well-represented to have opportunities to not only share their experiences but feel they can give back through their stories.

APPENDIX

Sample Recruitment Message

I plan to use a combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods to recruit approximately 8-16 individuals that match my study's targeted population through referrals from friends, family, acquaintances, and initial study participants. I anticipate participants will be recruited verbally via in-person introductions, by phone, and through email.

<u>Sample Email Written Directly to Potential Participants:</u>

Hello [Name],

I am currently working on my Master's Project in Conflict Resolution at the University of Massachusetts Boston, for which I am conducting a study to explore and better understand how East Asian and Caucasian individuals who have lived as both a member of a racial majority and racial minority environment understand the development and impact of their body image on their lives. This study has been approved by UMass Boston's Institution Review Board (IRB). I hope through this study to explore, give voice, and learn from each individual's unique experiences.

Would you be interested and available to take part in my study? Participation will involve one semi-structured individual interview (estimated to last about 30-90 minutes long), filling out a Demographic Survey (*form attached*), and optional participation in a member check process after the interview before I conclude my final write-up to validate whether my interpretation of your interview matched what you felt to be your intended meaning. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and if you do decide to take part in the study you can withdraw your participation at any time without any consequences.

Please let me know if you have any questions! I have also attached a copy of my Informed Consent form that I would ask any participant to read and sign before taking part. Please feel free to look over this form more details about the study and your rights should you decide to participate.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Teresa Yeh

401-226-7703
Teresa.Yeh001@umb.edu

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
East Asian & Caucasian Body Image Experiences as Racial Majority and Racial Minority Members

University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Conflict Resolution
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA. 02125-3393

Introduction and Contact Information
      Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research project aimed at better understanding how East Asian and Caucasian adults who have lived in both an environment where they were a member of the racial majority and one where they were a member of the racial minority understand their body image *(the subjective perceptions and experiences of their body, particularly of physical appearance, and its meaning and impact on their lives).* The Primary Investigator is Teresa Yeh, a Master's student in the Department of Conflict of Resolution at UMass Boston, supervised by her Research Advisor Dr. Karen Ross. Please read this form and feel free to direct questions to either Teresa Yeh (401-226-7703 or Teresa.Yeh001@umb.edu) or Dr. Karen Ross (Karen.Ross@umb.edu) at any time.

Description of the Project:
      Participation in this project will involve filling out a demographic survey and taking part in a semi-structured interview that will be audiotaped and transcribed for the purposes of this study. With participants' consent, they will also be engaged after post-interview to give feedback in a member check process during a data analysis stage prior to any presentation or publication of final written products.

Voluntary Participation:
      The decision whether or not to take part in this study is completely voluntary. If any participant does decide to take part in this project, they may terminate participation at any time without any negative consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, please communicate your intent to Teresa Yeh and any data collected from you for the study at that point will be destroyed. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize you.

Consent to Audio-Taping and Transcription:
      Individual interviews will be audiotaped in order to facilitate the researcher's accurate recall of participants' contributions. The tapes will be kept in password-protected files, listened to and transcribed by Teresa Yeh alone, and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study.
      Unless you as a participant specifically choose to share identifying information and explicitly give written consent that you would like your real name and/or other identifying information to be used in the study, your name and other identifying information such as addresses, voice, and picture will <u>not</u> be associated with the audiotapes or any resulting transcript. However, general demographic information collected (i.e. race/ethnicity, age, gender, countries of residence etc.) may be associated with resulting transcribed data for the purposes of

analysis and presentation of study results. All collected data will be kept in password-protected files accessible only by Teresa Yeh.

Risks/Discomfort:

  While risks posed to participants of this study should be minimal, one possible risk is the emergence of negative or distressful feelings in response to questions asked or content discussed in the individual interviews or demographic surveys. If you feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session or at any other point in the study, you have the right to decline to answer any question, end the interview, or withdraw from the study with no penalty or negative repercussions.

  Another potential risk is that given the interview methodology, despite designs to maintain participants' anonymity, there may be potential that details from interview transcripts of specific life experiences combined with demographic information could lead to informed guesses of participant identity by those outside the study in the final write-up. Efforts will be made to eliminate or disguise any identity-revealing details as determined by participants' after the interview session and/or during the member check process to help maintain anonymity, and all participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point due to such concerns and have their data destroyed and excluded from final study results.

Anonymity/Confidentiality:

  This study is designed to be anonymous. That is, the information collected will not include information that specifically identifies participants such as names, telephone numbers, voice, or images unless a participant specifically asks to share such information and explicitly gives written consent they would like their real name and/or other identifying information to be used in the study. Otherwise, all collected data including demographic surveys and interview transcripts will use code names and will be kept separate from signed informed consent forms in password-protected files.

  In addition, interviews with all participants will be conducted at a time and place chosen to maximize participant privacy. Efforts will also be made to eliminate or disguise any identity-revealing details as determined by participants' after the interview session and/or during the member check process to help maintain anonymity, and all participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point due to such concerns and have their data destroyed and excluded from final study results.

Benefits:

  Participants in this study will benefit from the opportunity to self-reflect and contribute to greater knowledge on the unique experiences of how East Asian and Caucasian adults who have lived as members of both a racial majority and a racial minority environment understand and experience their body image. Data from this study may contribute to identifying, 1) factors that can be considered in creating more culturally-tailored individual, group, or community-level intervention or prevention strategies to reduce body image dissatisfaction and promote positive body image, and 2) potentially overlooked areas for future research.

Rights:

  You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach the Principle Investigator Teresa Yeh at 401-226-7703 and Teresa.Yeh001@umb.edu or her Research Advisor Dr. Karen Ross at

Karen.Ross@umb.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or email at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Signatures:
I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date   Signature of Researcher

_____   _____
Printed Name of Participant   Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

Demographic Survey

*Please direct any questions you may have regarding this survey to
Teresa Yeh at 401-226-7703 or Teresa.Yeh001@umb.edu*

1. Name (*Optional*): _____

2. Interview Date: _____

3. Age: _____

4. Gender: _____

5. Sexual Orientation: _____

6. Race(s): _____

7. Ethnicity(ies): _____

8. Current City/Country of Residence: _____ Year(s): _____

9. Previous Cities/Countries of Residence:
    a. *EXAMPLE*: San Francisco, CA, USA; 1995-1998
    b. City/Country: _____, Year(s): _____
    c. City/Country: _____, Year(s): _____
    d. City/Country: _____, Year(s): _____
    e. City/Country: _____, Year(s): _____
    f. City/Country: _____, Year(s): _____
    g. If there are more, please list on back side of this form.

10. Weight: _____

11. Height: _____

12. Occupation: _____

13. Highest Level of Education Completed: _____

14. Primary/Preferred Language(s): _____

Contact Information (*Optional*)

Would you be willing to be contacted after this interview for the member check process?

Y: _____   N:_____

If yes, please fill out the following:

    Cell or Home Phone: _____

    Email: _____

    Other (i.e. Skype, mailing address): _____

    What is the best way to reach you? _____