

Spring 5-2014

Body Image and Beauty Routines Among College Women: Genital Grooming and Sexual Attitudes

Amber L. Hammons
University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hammons, Amber L., "Body Image and Beauty Routines Among College Women: Genital Grooming and Sexual Attitudes" (2014). *Honors Theses*. 232.
https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/232

This Honors College Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu, Jennie.Vance@usm.edu.

The University of Southern Mississippi

Body Image and Beauty Routines Among College Women: Genital Grooming and
Sexual Attitudes

by

Amber Hammons

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Science
in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology

May 2014

Approved by

Amy Chasteen Miller, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser
Professor of Sociology
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

H. Edwin Jackson, Ph.D., Chair
Department of Anthropology and Sociology

David R. Davies, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

ABSTRACT

The selection of body altering products available to twenty-first century women is easily accessible and widely utilized. These products, though, are vastly different from those once available to their female predecessors. Although women's bodies have been sites for societal pressure and control for centuries before the twenty-first, American girls in this century experience body image norms and pressures in qualitatively different ways than girls who came before them. Of particular interest to this study is the differing bodily experience of early twentieth century women to that of twenty-first century women.

The trading in of corsets and floor-length dresses for razors and bikinis is a key change in terms of this research. By using a historical context as well as sociological theory and methods, this research aims to understand women's current body trends, especially those pertaining to genital alteration as they relate to societal pressures and genital self-esteem levels. As such, this project seeks specifically to examine women's beauty routines and practices, especially relating to genital alteration, societal pressures, and genital self-esteem. As such, this project seeks to understand the bodily experiences of women and the bodily choices they make and why. Emergent themes this thesis explores include: beauty routines: mom and the media; puberty stories; intimate partner expectations; female genital self-image; and the ideal vagina.

Key Words: genitals, body, sexuality, hair removal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, my utmost gratitude is owed to Dr. Amy Miller for taking me on as my advisor for a topic as intimate as this project sought to research. The process of participating in this thesis has been difficult and filled with challenges, but I am grateful to have had an advisor that supported and made time for me regardless of how busy her schedule was. Thanks for inspiring me to think outside the box and pursue a topic I feel very passionately about. I couldn't have completed this project without your help, thank you for your patience.

Thanks to Dr. Ann Marie Kinnell for her instruction in “Methods of Sociological Research,” which gave me vital research information needed to complete this thesis.

Thanks to Dr. Julie Reid for being a listening ear and a constant encouragement to continue this project.

Thanks also to Dr. Herbenick and Dr. Michael Reece for allowing me to use their survey instrument.

My sincere gratitude also goes to all of the busy people that found time to participate in this study by providing their valued opinions. Thanks for responding to my requests and welcoming me—along with my many questions—with enthusiasm.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Chapter II: Literature Review	4
<i>Impression Management and the Body as Project</i>	4
<i>Body Hair as a Symbol</i>	7
<i>Intimate Body Projects: Female Genital Modification</i>	9
Chapter III: Methodology	12
<i>Project Design</i>	12
<i>Data Collection</i>	12
<i>Research Participants</i>	13
<i>Data and Analysis</i>	14
<i>Limitations of the Research</i>	15
<i>Special Considerations</i>	15
Chapter IV: Data and Analysis	17
<i>Beauty Routines: Mom and the Media</i>	17
<i>Puberty Stories</i>	20
<i>Intimate Partner Expectations</i>	21
<i>Female Genital Self Image and the Ideal Vagina</i>	24
Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion	27
References	33
Appendix A: Survey Instrument	37
Appendix B: Consent to Participate.....	38

Appendix C: Interview Schedule	39
Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer.....	41
Appendix E: Survey Data	42
Appendix F: IRB Approval Letter	44

CHAPTER I: Introduction

Since the turn of the twentieth century, American women's bodies have become an increased object of scrutiny and alteration. Prior to the twentieth century, American women were expected to focus on good deeds and spirituality instead of their appearance and bodily impression (Brumberg, 1997; Hope 1982). What Brumberg (1997) refers to as "the twentieth century's unveiling of the female body" put women into a new era of the body as a project rather than a tool for spiritual advancement (Brumberg 1997).

Women's body hair as part of the larger body project began with the removal of underarm hair and has now spread to the removal of pubic hair (Hope 1982). Aside from pubic hair modification, a larger realm of genital modification has hit twentieth century women in a way that their predecessors never experienced. New genital alteration trends include the decoration of the pubic region with fake diamonds, known as vajazzling, as well as the dyeing of the pubic hair region accompanied by hair removal or shaping. In the past decade, new surgical trends aimed at genital modification have arisen as well (Tiggeman and Kenyon, 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, Choi 2005; Hope 1982; Brumberg 1997).

These trends prompted a number of sociological questions, stemming from the prior literature on women's embodiment. Is genital modification a new body project for all women, or do these trends vary depending on racial identity and sexuality? Does genital perception play a role in women's modification decisions; if so, what are the consequences of this? My study seeks to explore an area of women's body projects that many researchers have overlooked or ignored in their previous examinations of women's

beauty routines. In doing so, I examine women's body projects through a theoretical framework of Goffman's (1959) presentation of self and the dramaturgical model. By examining women's presentations of self in their genital modifications, I hope to further explore their bodily experiences by engaging in in-depth interviews as well as a survey scale measuring women's genital self-esteem. The survey measurement will provide numerical data to judge the respondents overall genital self-image attitudes. These surveys will be complimented by in-depth interviews that can give voice to real women's experiences with their genitals.

In Chapter One, a brief introduction is presented to orient the reader to the thesis and topic at hand. In Chapter Two, I examine literature relevant to this project. First, historical accounts of women's initial body routines and engagement in hair removal by gender historians Brumberg (1997) and Hope (1982) are presented in order to give a broad account of modern women's body routines. Embodiment theory by Howson (2004) and Goffman (1959) are also examined in terms of how women are experiencing their worlds through their bodies. Then, recent studies conducted by other gender scholars in various fields are examined for relevant themes relating to women's genital attitudes and genital modifications.

In Chapter Three, I detail the methodology used and the research setting and sample for this project. Methodology included one survey instrument measuring women's genital attitudes as well as four in-depth interviews designed to discuss women's body and genital routines and experiences. In Chapter Four, emergent themes from the interview and survey data are discussed in depth including: beauty routines; mom and the media; puberty stories; intimate partner expectations; and female genital

self-image and the ideal vagina. In Chapter Five, data are discussed and conclusions are drawn, including implications for further research.

CHAPTER II: Literature Review

This chapter aims to both provide a historical context in which to analyze women's grooming routines and also introduce current research approaches for studying women's intimate body projects. This chapter first explores the history of women's hair removal and explores various reasons for changing trends in women's body presentations. This discussion gives more recent research a historical context and provides a framework for approaches to issues of body image and appearance practices. Finally, twenty-first century women's body routines and reasoning are explored related to theoretical perspectives utilized in this research.

Part I: Impression Management and the Body as Project

"Embodiment," as it is used in this study, is a way of viewing the biological body as playing a vital part in social interactions, not merely seeing the body as a secondary object within lived experiences (Howson 2004:14). It is the combined theory of body as object as well as the body as a felt experience (2004:15). Through the concept of embodiment, the body becomes a crucial factor in the development of self as it interacts with the world around it (2004:15). Erving Goffman's (1959) approach to the creation of self follows this concept of embodiment. In Goffman's (1959) book, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, he focuses on the management of bodily impressions within social interactions. The framework that Goffman (1959) developed, the dramaturgical model, views individuals as social actors that seek to manage their impressions in social encounters especially through the visual display of self. This is similar to an actor on

stage that calculates and presents a certain character or image as it pertains to the storyline. The body serves as a tool for impression management in that the social actors communicate certain image messages through the physical presentation of the body. “Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner,” explains Goffman (1959:6), “expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression that it is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain.”

“Impression Management” and “embodiment” are terms that help to explain the importance of the body in social interactions and in establishing social symbolic meanings. Another term helpful in conceptualizing the idea of the presentation of the body as a means of developing self is “body idiom,” another term used in Goffman’s analysis of impression management (Howson 2004). This term refers to the shared understanding of body experiences or body language such as a handshake or an eye roll. Because of the body idiom of the handshake or the eye roll, actors within the same culture understand those social cues and can interact with them. He also stresses that identities exist in relation to other actors. The meanings of the body’s appearance are instrumental in creating social identity and a sense of self that is mediated by what actors assume is society’s perception of them (2004).

We see similarities to Goffman’s theories of the body as a means of identity development in Brumberg’s theory on the body as a project for American girls. Brumberg’s insightful study The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls (1997) explores the twentieth century ideal of women’s bodies as ever changing projects through the analysis of numerous journals written by American girls from the beginning

of the twentieth century to the latter part. A body project, as defined by Brumberg (1997), refers to the ways in which American women have come to view their bodies as tangible representations of their selves to be continuously altered and molded to fit the situated normative physical standards or to create a desired identity. In other words, over time, American girls began more and more to see their bodies as something that they worked on, something that was a “project” for them. Rather than looking outward to society and valuing contributing to the social good as a key component of womanhood, girls more and more came to understand that being a woman was about making your body look a certain way that was prescribed and idealized by society. Goffman’s concept of impression management (1959) is applicable to the concept of body projects (Brumberg 1997) in that American girls continuously manage their body appearance in order to present the situational image messages that reflect the desired self. In the case of body projects, girls seek to present impressions of physical beauty, desirability, and especially normality (Brumberg 1997).

Why did American girls shift from a focus on self through good deeds to a focus on self through physicality? Brumberg (1997) theorizes that during the turn of the twentieth century, various media outlets began campaigning for the “unveiling the female body” (98). As Brumberg (1997) states, “this new freedom to display the body was accompanied, however, by demanding beauty and dietary regimens that involved money as well as discipline” (98). American girls, for the first time on this large of a scale, were seeing media images of what society was dictating as the normative standard and began pursuing those same images for themselves. Author Christine Hope (1982) offers a similar explanation for United States’ women’s new beauty pursuits. Hope (1982) asserts

that prints advertising in magazines dating from 1914-1945 are largely responsible for establishing the beauty normative of the time. Examples of these norms include women's removal of under-arm and leg hair as first championed in Harper's Bazaar. Ideals of flawless, soft skin were also visible in those earliest magazines. For the first time in the history of the United States, young girls were surrounded by widespread images of the culturally defined physical standard to which they should aspire.

Part II: Body Hair as a Symbol

Of particular interest to Hope's (1982) research is women's body hair removal. As stated by sociologist Anthony Synnott (1987), "hair is perhaps our most powerful symbol of individual and group identity, first because it is physical and therefore extremely personal, and second because, although personal, it is also public rather than private" (381). Manipulating hair can serve as a tool for impression management, a way to present a certain group or individual identity. Synnott (1987) explains that body hair in particular serves as a distinguisher for group identity such as between men and women or between heterosexual and homosexual individuals. In the context of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, men are expected to have more body hair and women are expected to little to no body hair (Synnott 1987, Hope 1982, Brumberg 1997). Any differentiation from those binomial norms and assumptions may lead to societal questioning of the sexual orientation or deviant status of the actor (1987). In fact, a recent study (Fahs 2011) detailed the account of 34 undergraduate college women completing an extra credit assignment to refrain from removing any amount of body hair for ten weeks. The study (2011) revealed that sexual identity is linked to body hair

practices in the United States. Many of the participants experienced heterosexism and homophobia from friends and family because of their non-removal of body hair (2011).

In Hope's (1982) analysis of various early twentieth century magazines and advertisements, she finds a correlation between the trend of underarm hair removal and the introduction of an advertisement in Harper's Bazaar. Magazines such as Harper's Bazaar introduced the first advertisements that featured women with hairless underarms (1982), an unheard of practice prior to that. These advertisements were originally aimed at upper class white women, but the trend of hair removal has reached a far bigger audience than just that group of women (Hope, 1982; Tiggemann and Kenyon, 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, and Choi, 2005.)

In the twenty-first century, almost one hundred years since the first introduction of underarm hair removal in advertising (Hope 1982), women's body hair removal has become such a normative component of femininity that little research has been done to investigate the reasons why women do it. Instead, most of the research done on women's hair removal has focused on the frequency that women engage in hair removal. According to a study conducted of 678 women in the United Kingdom (Toerien, Wilkinson, Choi 2005), over 99% of women interviewed reported shaving their leg and underarm hair on a regular basis. Researchers discuss how "As such, women's depilatory practices not only contribute substantially to the cosmetic industry, but reinforce the view that underpins all the body-changing procedures, from make-up application to cosmetic surgery: that a woman's body is unacceptable if left unaltered" (Toerian, Wilkinson, Choi 2005: 400). This concept ties directly into Brumberg's (1997) notion of American girl's bodies becoming continuous and personal projects.

In similar studies, the researchers reaffirmed that women's removal of body hair is a normative expectation of women (Tiggeman and Kenyon, 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, Choi 2005; Hope 1982; Brumberg 1997.) Researchers (1998) conclude that the "ideal of youth" as presented on the survey was the driving force for women to remove their hair. This study also presents the theory that body hair has contradictory symbolic meaning. Although it represents a sexual maturity, hair is also seen as non-feminine. Therefore, to be feminine is to represent immaturity in your body performance (Tiggeman and Kenyon 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005).

Part III: Intimate Body Projects: Female Genital Modification

A theme that permeates multiple literatures (Basow 1991; Tiggeman and Kenyon 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005; Blumberg 1997; Hope 1982) is the negative consequences of the normative expectation for women to remove body hair, especially now that the expectation for women to remove body hair includes their genital area. With the rise of genital modification surgery in that past decade, many experts are pointing to the increased scrutiny of women's genitals as the main driving force behind this phenomenon (Basow 1991; Tiggeman and Kenyon 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005). Many studies have evaluated whether or not body dissatisfaction had a role to play in the increase in women's decisions to have cosmetic surgeries. One study by Menzel et al (2011) found that participants with higher scores in body dissatisfaction were more likely to consider and go through with plastic surgery. Eriksen and Goering (2011) found that individuals with friends who had undergone cosmetic surgery were 126% more likely to seek out cosmetic surgery for themselves.

Just as advertisements and other forms of media images had an affect on girls' body projects in the early twentieth century (Hope 1982; Brumberg 1997), so have those same kinds of images shaped women's decisions to participate in intimate body projects in the twenty-first century (Lloyd et al. 2004). According to Lloyd et al. (2004), images of women's bare bodies in the media are common, but those images do not show genitalia. In fact, realistic representations of women's genitals are rarely seen. Unlike noses, lips, and thighs, others do not commonly see genitalia; as such, in day-to-day life women are not exposed to many different varieties of "normal" genitalia. Ideas about one needing cosmetic surgery or other genital modification are often based on a mythical ideal, as many researchers and activists have argued (Lloyd et al 2004).

In the study "Genital Appearance Dissatisfaction," Schick, Calabrese, Rima, and Zucker (2010) surveyed 217 female undergraduate students in the U.S. to determine what their perception of their genital area is and how their beliefs are shaped about it. The researchers found that "greater dissatisfaction with the visual genital appearance was associated with higher genital image self-consciousness during physical intimacy-which was associated with lower sexual esteem, sexual satisfaction, and motivation to avoid risky sexual behaviors" (Schick, et al 2010: 395). Other studies (e.g. Herbenick 2009; Herbenick and Reece 2010), helped developed a standardized scale for surveys about attitudes toward genital smell, size, appearance, and taste.

In the existing research, there is an overwhelming discussion of women's genital dissatisfaction as playing a key factor in women's genital modification (Basow 1991; Tiggeman and Kenyon 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005). Much of the academic discourse on women's genital modification focuses on the increased number of

labiaplasties or vaginal lifts in the field of plastic surgery and the lack of education about the notion of the “ideal vagina” provided to participants of that surgery (Basow 1991; Tiggeman and Kenyon 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005; Schick et al 2010). Although the research discusses the negative consequences and implications of this rising practice, none of the research has explored women’s reasons for pursuing it in detail. As such, this study serves as an exploratory means for addressing that research gap.

As emphasized by many genital modification researchers (Basow 1991; Tiggeman and Kenyon 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005; Schick, Calabrese, Rima, and Zucker 2010; Herbenick 2009; Fahs 2011) women’s hair removal is a normative practice for twenty-first century women. Although Hope (1982) would argue that genital hair is the logical next step in the assault on women’s body hair, it has not been concluded that this practice is normative to the extent that leg and underarm hair removal have become. Therefore, I plan to document women’s hair removal and modification practices by gathering information from women themselves. In addition, I will examine the intersecting reasons for or against genital modification, including women’s possible genital dissatisfaction.

CHAPTER III: Methodology

Interest in this project came from an assignment on gendered products in a Sociology of the Body course. I focused my project on razors and comparing their gendered marketing strategies. A content analysis of razors led to a literature review detailing early hair removal norms for women and first appearances of hair removal advertisements. This project was the origin of my specific research interest in body hair expectations for women in the twenty-first century.

Project Design

After composing an extensive literature review of historical accounts and recent study findings, I developed a project framework that included both surveys and interviews. Therefore, I designed the project to include in-person interviews and online surveys (hosted by Qualtrics). The survey instrument is a standardized and validated tool designed by Dr. Debra Herbenick and Dr. Michael Reece at the University of Indiana, Bloomington. Permission to use Dr. Herbenick and Dr. Reece's survey instrument was obtained prior to the beginning of data collection. Approval for the research was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Data Collection

Once IRB approval was obtained, I solicited responses by placing the survey online and advertising for interview subjects. Survey respondents were also given the chance to engage as interview subjects as well by contacting the researcher following the survey (contact information was provided online). Social media such as Facebook was used in advertising for survey respondents who helped circulate the link. Snowball sampling was also utilized in recruiting subjects.

Interview subjects contacted the researcher on their own schedules through text messages and voice calls. Once a place and time was designated for an interview, the researcher met with them and recorded the interview on the researcher's laptop. Generally, participants who reached out to do interviews were more open and excited to talk about this topic than a more general audience would be. That being said, the tone of the interviews was casual and conversational. Participants treated the interview as if it was a tell-all with a close friend. That being said, interviews tended to be short, lasting between 15-40 minutes. Although participants seemed talkative and open to the subject, many times they answered questions without going into deep detail, requiring the researcher to probe further. Beginnings of interviews proved much more relaxed and detail oriented. The beginnings of interviews involve discussing body routines and what women do to get ready for the day. When the discussion continued on to puberty and sexual partner experience, interviewees tended to become quieter and more serious in tone. Many had dealt with emotional pain during puberty and from sexual partners that interfered with the conversational flow of the interview.

Research Participants

Survey participants were not asked to reveal their demographic information as part of the survey instrument. Since the survey was a qualitative companion to the interviews and because of the sensitivity of the topic, demographics were not accounted for. Women were directed to a screen asking them to verify that they were between the ages of 18-24. Since age was not a factor sought in this project, the participant pool was limited to that age range. A total of 34 people completed online surveys.

Interview subjects were women 18-24 years of age. Originally, six interviews were conducted, but two interviewees asked that their interviews not be included in the final project. Of those included in the study, three interviewees were age 24 and one interviewee was 23. Of these four women interviewed, two identified as Caucasians, one identified as African American, and one identified as Latina. Three out of four interview subjects identified as being lesbians with the last interview subject identifying as bisexual. Since this sample was found through snowball sampling and word of mouth, it explains why the interview subjects were all similar in age and sexual orientation. They all came from the same social circle.

Data and Analysis

Following data collection, all documents (i.e. consent forms, information sheets, and interview guides containing notes and annotations) were secured in individual folders labeled “Confidential” then placed in a secure file, along with a master list matching interview numbers to the subjects’ actual names, at the researcher’s home. Data were pulled and emergent themes and trends were analyzed. Upon completion of analysis, all materials were transferred to a locked file at the office of Dr. Amy Miller, advisor to this research, to be stored for five years, at which time consent forms, information sheets, interview guides, and the master list matching interview numbers to actual names will be destroyed. Only the anonymous, digital copies of the transcriptions will be saved indefinitely. It should also be noted that given the sensitive nature of this subject matter of the population, extra care was taken to avoid exposing any connection between an individual and the opinions/findings expressed. Not only were names, addresses, etc.

excluded, but also subjects' place of employment, hometown, and other potential identifiers.

Interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents then analyzed line by line for emergent themes or patterns of similar answers among interviewees. Survey data was pulled into one chart allowing for ease of analyzing each individual respondent's number. The survey scale measures women's scores from 7-28 with 7 being the lowest score indicating poor genital self image and 28 being the highest indicating positive self image. These numbers were organized into one chart and analyzed for presence of low scores. In this case, most scores were high, which was noted in later discussions.

Limitations of the Research

Due to the small-scale sample of survey participants and interview subjects, the data collected are not generalizable to a broader population. Not only this, but statistics could not be run due to how small the sample was; again, sample size limited an aspect of analyzing the data further. Snowball sampling, although convenient and helpful to researchers exploring as sensitive of a topic as this, is not random and limits the ability of the researcher to make generalized conclusions.

Special Considerations

This research presented several unique challenges in the collection of data. First, due to the sensitive topic as well as the age limitation, only 34 individuals finished the survey after starting. A 32% drop out rate hindered the data from being a larger pool. The reason for this dropout rate may be two-fold. One, the second page of the survey asked women to confirm that they were between the ages of 18-24. At this point, many women may have dropped out of the survey after realizing they did not qualify to partake

in it. Two, once women got to questions they did not feel comfortable answering, even on an anonymous survey, they dropped out.

Getting women to interview for this project was especially difficult. Whereas the survey was anonymous, the interview required that participants meet face-to-face to discuss issues of puberty, their descriptions of their own genitals, and their sexual experiences. These topics are sensitive and personal, which may have made potential interview subjects hesitate knowing their responses would be recorded. The topic of women's intimate body projects is also one that women are not socially allowed to engage in. Talking about women's genitals tends to be taboo. This fact likely influenced whether potential interview participants felt they could engage in that type of conversation with the researcher.

CHAPTER IV: DATA AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents and describes themes that emerged from subjects' responses to both surveys and semi-structured interviews. Four primary themes emerged from the data, each of which are discussed in turn in this chapter: (1) beauty routines: media, moms, and peer pressure; (2) puberty stories; (3) intimate partner expectations; (4) the ideal vagina and female genital self image. Conclusions drawn from these themes are discussed in Chapter V.

Beauty Routines: Mom and the Media

Interview questions were developed to prompt discussion of women's beauty routines. I was interested in their practices as well as the development of these beauty routines and beauty ideals. The general nature of the questions aided in identifying areas for more focused inquiry about specific rituals such as genital alteration. All four interview participants noted some type of normative beauty routine, mainly citing their morning routines.

Uh...in order for me to get ready, yeah I would have to automatically take a shower. Um yeah, it consists of all the shampooing and body washes and stuff. Um...afterwards it's just getting the right outfit and brushing my teeth making sure I just take care of...take care of anything that will make people feel uncomfortable. That would put off somebody else. (Patty)

In the morning, I hop in the shower for like a minute or two, to kinda wash away the sweat from the night before and make sure I don't smell bad...soap and water and all that. I don't wash my hair...um...I don't like blow dryers or anything, and I don't like going to work with wet hair. But at night, I come home and take a much longer shower...um...I just, you know, shave if I feel like it, I'm not dating anyone right now...so. (Jamie)

Uh...I guess in the mornings I, get up and the first thing I do is brush my teeth, then if I didn't shower the night before I'll shower in the evening. I usually don't dry my hair. I put on deodorant. I put on perfume. (Presleigh)

At night in the shower, I um wash my face at night and moisturize and all that good stuff. In the morning, uh, I wake up. I pee. I brush my teeth. I brush my hair. Um...if I'm a little dry I apply more lotion. (Tina)

Every interview participant cited a need to participate in routines based on a need for cleanliness, especially in relation to body odor such as brushing teeth, showering, and applying deodorant. This pattern was especially clear as a concern for Patty who further explained the meaning of "anything that will make people feel uncomfortable" or "put somebody off:

Like reassuring that I don't leave the house quote unquote 'a mess.' Making sure the hair is right, making sure I smell good, making sure there's no...uh...nothing quote unquote 'dirty' or smelly or nothing under those terms. (Patty)

Evident also in respondents' answers was a need to perform these routines in preparation for leaving the house, as if these routines would not be as important without an audience to witness the end results.

When asked about the reasons why they and other women might engage in their particular beauty routines, respondents most often referenced two sources: their mothers and the media. In terms of media, the names of popular women's and teenage girls magazines came up several times during interviews.

I feel strongly that people are heavily influenced by the media...um...you know you don't see big girls or unattractive girls quote unquote in magazines or any... I mean like Cosmopolitan. I mean our mothers use Cosmopolitan... Like we've been...you know...it's been around for a long time and then it's like...it just seems like, that is one of those things we fall into. And, you know, we follow by example so why not? And...um...I think everyone forgets about what's real and I think that scares us. (Patty)

I think its reinforced in subtler ways...um...like media and like makeup, I guess fashion industries for lack of a better term. (Jamie)

Aside from women's magazines, respondents also emphasized the indirect pressure they felt from their classmates to conform to certain beauty norms. For instance, respondents sought to avoid being the only girl with hairy legs, especially in descriptions of their first experiences with leg or genital hair removal. Many even admitted that they only considered removing body hair for the first time once they heard their female classmates discuss it. The fear of being an outsider in the world of young women was enough to convince these women to follow the hairless norm:

The clearest in my head was...um...when we had like an end of the year fieldtrip to Six Flags theme park. And...um...I just knew I had to shave my legs. I didn't want like my classmates to like see me with hairy legs. That's what really sticks out in my head when I first started shaving. (Tina)

I always though it [hair] was there...ya know...because it was supposed to be there. But then I realized that...ya know...it wasn't just this one person, it was a lot of people that did it [remove genital hair] so I thought ok maybe I was wrong this whole time...so, I kinda felt like it sucked because I couldn't be myself. Then after I shaved, I started...um...feeling more comfortable without the hair than I was before. (Presleigh)

[In response to why she began shaving] So that I could be like everyone else because I already felt different...so...that's what the popular girls did. (Presleigh)

For one respondent, the pressure from her peers even came in the form of teasing and bullying about her body hair:

I was 12 or 13. I wanted to start shaving sooner and my mom would not let me, and I think the teasing finally from like kids at summer camp got so bad that she let me use Nair first...then she finally gave me a razor. (Jamie)

For most of the women interviewed, moms served as one of their main routes of socialization into beauty routines and expectations, especially in terms of hair removal. In Tina's case, her mother's hair removal influenced her to remove hair as well. Tina

explained that the first time she shaved her legs as well as got her eyebrows waxed was because she knew her mom did both of those things

I probably started...um...I wanna say maybe 5th or 6th grade. I started shaving my legs. I did it because my mom did it...one day I was like mom I wanna get my eyebrows too and so she was like ok...once again it was something that my mom did.

In contrast, Jamie's leg hair removal was actually delayed by her mother's influence. She explained that her mother was more conservative than most about her daughter's body. She wouldn't allow Jamie to start removing leg hair until she was 12 or 13, and that was only after she had been teased by other children.

Puberty Stories

Puberty can be a time of immense change for many American women as they enter sexual maturity. Puberty can lead to incredible body changes for most women, such as newly grown hair, growth of breasts, and newly placed fat deposits around areas of the body, like hips and thighs. Interview participants were asked about their experiences with puberty and their attitudes toward their bodies during this time of change. For Patty, puberty was an entrance into womanhood, a time when she could no longer deny her sexuality and specific gender presentation:

Ok...um so yeah it was a hard transition for me to go through puberty, at least those first stages, which was...uh...the growth of breasts, then of course the hair came along. And...of course, the genitalia thing it was starting to take shape I guess you can say. So it was...it was once again just showing that feminine side of me. It was a confirmation and I just didn't like it at all...It was like a shameful thing because like I was gay and like I felt like I had to conceal it and then it was a struggle because I didn't have to be hide it because I was young and free from sex, like I didn't...not all topics of sex were affecting me. So, I felt like nothing would affect me. Now, though that I have these new curves and new modifications going on it felt like something struck and now I have to feel this role I felt like wasn't for me. It's a struggle because coming from my standpoint I

was...I don't fit that role so how am I going to interpret this? It's a struggle...so of course things like shaving, making sure that I take all the hygiene procedures to the T ya know, was a reassurance of trying to work with what I got. And...you know...to this day it's still, so it's just one of those things. (Patty)

Patty's experience with puberty was thus a time of sexual awakening associated not only with massive body changes but also changes in her treatment of her sexuality. Until that point, she had been able to largely ignore her sexual and gender identity. Puberty marked a milestone into gendered routines to which she felt she was pressured to conform.

Jamie too noted that her experience during puberty involved immense pressure to fit a hairless norm, this time from her female peers. Her experience at summer camp served as a major socializing force as other campers made fun of her leg hair. Other interview respondents had similar experiences with noting that they felt as if everyone else had started shaving already, which prompted them to start removing leg hair as well.

I think I was 13 and all my friends had started shaving and I had really dark leg hair. (Presleigh)

It's so taboo, like, ya know... 'she's got hairy legs gross...' and I wanted to fit in so... all my classmates shaved their legs, and so I shaved mine too. (Tina)

Intimate Partner Expectations

Based on prior research on genital attitudes and grooming practices, intimate partner expectations were assumed to be a primary force behind women engaging in genital altering activities. In part, this expectation is because genitals are not as publicly displayed as other parts of the body like legs, eyebrows, and underarms, so few people have the opportunity to comment on the appearance of a person's genitals. Questions were thus posed about women's experience with sexual partners and genital interactions or attitudes held by their various sexual partners. Many women interviewed noted that

they believed most other women alter body hair and their genitals not for themselves, but for their partners. Almost every respondent made comments about how frequently they shaved their genitals based on their level of sexual activity at the time.

When I'm dating or when I was looking to date, like being set up with friends and stuff like that...um...I would shave. If I'm not intimate with anyone, I'm not gonna shave. (Jamie)

I used to shave my vagina religiously and then I stopped because it got old, it got tired of it, and it's kinda a hassle. Then I got a girlfriend...and ya know...she like, she shaved hers so I shaved mine too like clockwork. We were long distance so every time before I saw her I would shave. (Tina)

But above all, I am self-conscious of what the other person or partner I have at the time, so I always try to maintain a suitable, um, balance I guess... Of course like, if I pursue someone that is very feminine and very clean and well-maintained, then I feel that I should meet that. That way it's not a one-way thing it's a two-way thing. So, for me, it's not just about myself, I'm also thinking about my.,my..significant other. (Patty)

When asked about various forms of alteration such as vajazzling and pubic hair dye, Tina responded that although she had never tried vajazzling, she would consider it for the benefit of her sexual partner. Patty and Presleigh responded similarly. Even though neither had tried other forms of alteration outside of waxing and shaving, such as vajazzling and pubic hair dye, they still recognized the possibility of doing so for intimate partner's benefits.

No...um...vajazzling I have thought of as a joke. I don't feel like my vagina needs jewels, they can get stuck in awkward places. Then again, if I'm feeling extra romantic, maybe, ya know. (Tina)

I've... I've heard of it and I have taken it into consideration, but since I have not been sexually active for the past four years it's just been backburner. (Patty)

No, I wouldn't...I feel like that other people do it so that they can appear prettier or sexier or more, um, desirable...like by the same sex or opposite sex, whatever preference. (Presleigh)

Respondents also discussed comments their sexual partners had made referring to their genitals. The accounts given indicate a mix of positive as well as negative

comments that their sexual partners made about their genital presentations or requests made by partners to alter their genitals. Patty and Presleigh both reported that they had experienced positive comments from some of their partners about the look and, in Patty's case, the taste of their genitals:

And as far as the comments, it was more like along the lines of 'it tastes good.
(Patty)

I've also heard I have a very nice vagina...whatever that means... (Presleigh)
Every respondent except for Patty had experienced negative comments. Presleigh, even though admitting have been told her vagina was nice, had another incident where a sexual partner had asked her to shave specifically; Tina expressed a similar experience:

I have had girlfriends that said they wouldn't sleep with me until I shaved, and I did it. (Tina)

Before I started shaving I was told that... you know... I shouldn't hide it behind all the hair or whatever. I felt like I should be shaving it because that's what you're supposed to do at the time...At the time I felt like it was a negative thing because I didn't know, because I always thought that it was there because it was supposed to be there. (Presleigh)

I've had one sexual partner comment like 'oh your labia looks funny,' he clearly made it known that he thought they were kinda wrinkly and saggy. I've received lots of comments on the rest of my body that weren't so great, but that's the only time someone has ever commented about those. (Jamie)

I've had partners request pubic hair modifications. (Jamie)

Every woman interviewed recognized sexual partner influence on their decisions to alter their genitals, whether that be negative or positive. Jamie, who identifies as bisexual, even commented that she feels like a lot of women are pressured into altering their body because of the men in their lives, especially heterosexual and bisexual women. "I'm bi, but I've had much more experience with men and I feel like a lot of pressure from men to

look a certain way...I've felt they are definitely the much judgier gender when it comes to body hair."

Female Genital Self Image and the Ideal Vagina

The survey instrument designed by Herbenick and Reece (2010) arranges responses on a numbered scale of 1-4. Each respondent's answers were added together to attain their overall score. Respondent's possible score range included 7-28 with a seven indicating poor genital self-image attitude and 28 indicating a positive self-image attitude. Fifty respondents overall took part in the survey, with only 34 completing the survey in its entirety. Of the thirty-four respondents, actual scores ranged from 14-28 with none of the 34 respondents scoring below a 14 on their inventory scale.

This scale complimented narrative interviews and the insights they provided about women's everyday experiences. These survey responses were meant to explore women's genital self-image attitudes as part of the bigger picture of women's genital attitudes and experiences. The women who answered this survey scored relatively high in how positively they feel about their genitals, which might reflect that genital self-image attitudes may not have as much influence on these women's decisions to modify their genitals as previously hypothesized. Following prior literature that suggests women are trying to meet an artificial genital standard, women interviewed were asked to describe what the ideal vagina looks like and then compare their own to that definition. Each respondent, aside from Presleigh who answered that there is no standard vagina, either defined what they felt was the ideal or normal vagina image or gave accounts of what they think other peoples ideals are. Although each respondent had their own definition,

some aspects echoed each other. For instance, consider the responses of Patty, Jamie, and Tina:

I think a voluptuous woman fits the profile. And as far as voluptuous to me it's not as only the shape it's the tone of the skin, the modification if there is modification as far as shaving or waxing...um...body piercing, you know uh, of course the taste would be another...um...that to me is just ah is an ideal if there were an ideal that would be ideal for me. (Patty)

To me, as you know a feminist, there's no such thing as the ideal vagina it's just whatever makes you happy blah blah blah. But then I think societally, it's you know... it has to be hairless, it has to be white because you know we value whiteness... um... it has to have very small labia... things like that. (Jamie)

I've heard a friend of mine saying that she wouldn't even consider talking to a girl because she heard from her ex that her vagina looks like a roast beef sandwich. I just think they all look the same though. All be it some may have different shades of color or some may be longer than others. (Tina)

When respondents were asked to then compare their own vagina to the description they had just given, they were split, with Presleigh and Tina responding that they believed their vaginas were "normal," while Jamie and Patty responded that they did not feel like they had normal vaginas. When asked to explain why, Jamie and Patty had this to say:

Uh...no because I have...I'm very complex and the reason why I am complex is that is because when I choose a partner, I choose somebody completely opposite of me...So when it directs to my vagina it's the same thing. I just want something different because I feel like I'll get a better experience that way. Because I am familiar with my territory. What about the other? (Patty)

Like I mentioned before, I'm really lazy. No one currently right now sees it. I haven't shaved my pubic hair at all... um... I really hate shaving my pubic hair in general. Also, I don't think I have particularly huge labia, but I know... um... the labia minora it sticks out beyond the labia majora which is normally photo shopped out. And also, I've noticed my skin tends to be a bit darker colored compared to the rest of my body. All those things make it not the cosmetic ideal. (Jamie)

Jamie and Patty also shared their insight as to where they as well as others might be getting their standards of the ideal vagina. As mentioned in previous questions on beauty

standards, both offered up the influence of the media again in their answer. Aside from this, though, both women mentioned the influence of heterosexual porn on either how they understood vaginas were supposed to look like or how others understood them.

I think a big thing is pornography, and I hate saying that because I don't think pornography is intrinsically bad... (Jamie)

(discussing the mental notes she takes while watching porn) Yeah, so I'm like ok if I find this attractive then does my partner find this...if I don't have that will this person find me attractive for not having that? Once again it's like one of those things where like attraction plays that role. And of course if I compare my notes to another person's notes, there are some things I find more attractive than my own, so it's kind of... I don't know if it's an ego thing or is it just ya know, insecurities. (Patty)

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The responses of women in this survey both reflect and counter some of the research on women's beauty routines, hair removal practices, and self-esteem. The current literature on women's body projects and beliefs focuses on the influence of media, namely women's magazines. The first entrances of hair removal advertisements appeared in women's magazines in the early 1920s (Hope 1982; Brumberg 1997). In this study, respondents noted that women's magazines still serve a powerful role in their ideals of how their body should look and what steps they should take to look that way, especially on their entrance into puberty. One subject used the example of how she felt there was an absence of "big girls or unattractive girls" in magazines like Cosmopolitan, which she felt impacted how women view themselves in comparison to what they are seeing in the magazine.

Although not as widely evident in the literature, respondents also mentioned the influence of their mothers in how they first decided what types of alteration should be done to their bodies. One respondent mentioned how the appearance of her mother's perfectly groomed eyebrows convinced her that she should have hers done as well. Since many women's mothers serve as feminine models to mimic, it is not surprising to hear that respondents noted their influence. Another woman interviewed noted that her mother prolonged any efforts to change her body hair; even though she recognized the various forms her mother took to alter her own body. Another vital influence on their decisions to first begin removing bodily hair from legs, under arms, and eyebrows was peer pressure. Respondents noted some level of pressure from their female peers. In some cases, this

pressure presented itself in the form of bullying and harassment; for others, it was a more subtle pressure they felt upon realizing every other girl at school had begun shaving except for them. Literature on early twentieth century women's body projects reviewed young girls diaries and found that they too experienced a subtle peer pressure from other young girls to conform to a certain standard of gendered appearance (Brumberg 1997).

When it comes to genital altering practices, none of the respondents had participated in any form of genital alteration outside of shaving and waxing their hair, although some respondents acknowledged that they might consider alterations such as vajazzling and pubic hair dye if it meant pleasing a sexual partner. As one participant put it, "if I'm feeling extra romantic, maybe." Another woman commented that even though she would never consider those genital alterations regardless of her lover, she understands why another woman would. As she explained:

I feel like that other people do it so that they can appear prettier or sexier or more, um, desirable...like by the same sex or opposite sex, whatever preference.

It is interesting to note the discrepancy between respondent's entrance into puberty, which was noted by all of them as enlargement of breasts, start of menstrual flow, and genital hair, and their attempts to prepare their genitals for sexual partners. The literature discusses the contradictory symbolic meaning of body hair for women. Although it represents a sexual maturity, it is also seen as non-feminine. Therefore, to be feminine is to represent immaturity in your body performance (Tiggeman and Kenyon 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005). Respondents noted that as they entered puberty and became young sexual beings, that pubic hair was one of the markers into this bodily transition. Yet, respondents also noted that in order to prepare for sexual intercourse or to "appear prettier or more, um, desirable," means to remove the hair that once served as a symbol

of sexual awakening. None of the respondents interviewed mentioned feeling “sexier” because of having genital hair; they felt the opposite. In fact, most of them referred to the occurrence of unshaven genital hair as a form of “laziness” on their part. Many women interviewed prefaced their discussions of their genital grooming practices by noting that they have gotten lazy since their hair is fully grown. As one respondent put it:

Like I mentioned before, I’m really lazy. No one currently right now sees it. I haven’t shaved my pubic hair at all.

From this line of reasoning, then, the respondents view unshaven genital hair as a reflection of a character flaw, that not shaving represents laziness. Literature has noted this same understanding of bodily presentations being linked to morality, but not in the genital sense (Hope 1982; Brumberg 1997; Fahs 2011). Not only that, but it also signifies that they are not a sexual being. Most women stated that unless they knew a partner might see the hair, they would not shave the hair away as regularly. Goffman (1959) argued that people prepare for their social roles and interactions the way that an actor prepares for a performance on stage. There is a backstage, private preparation that occurs so that social actors can perform the actions and rehearsals necessary to portray a given image. How we behave, then, in the backstage is very different from how we behave on the front stage. By looking at these women’s pubic hair routines through Goffman’s (1959) understanding of backstage and frontstage, we can see that in the backstage, women prepare their genitals in a way that they think will portray them as sexual and moral beings on the frontstage. By moral, I am referring to the issue of laziness and not shaving. A shaven genital area would represent a lack of laziness and therefore no character flaw to mention. This aspect of women’s pubic hair routines and attitudes is one that I believe requires further discussion and research.

Absent from the literature is discussion of the possible influences of porn on women's vaginal ideals. Two of the women interviewed gave very specific definitions of what they considered to be the ideal vagina, which researchers have noted is a scientific myth due to genetic variation (Basow 1991; Tiggeman and Kenyon 1998; Toerian, Wilkinson, and Choi 2005; Schick et al 2010). Regardless, these women believed in an ideal that their vaginas did not meet up with. When asked as to where they formed these definitions from, they noted various forms of media including pornography, specifically heterosexual pornography. With the ease of access to Internet porn in the United States, more research is needed on the impact of porn on women as well as men's genital perceptions of women's genitalia. One of the women who mentioned pornography also gave an example of her lover's hurtful comments when he questioned why her vagina did not look like the porn stars he was referencing. Although the effects of porn on women's genital self-esteem have not been thoroughly researched in the literature, the impact of negative genital self-image has been explored more fully. As Schick et al. (2010: 395) explain:

Greater dissatisfaction with the visual genital appearance was associated with higher genital image self-consciousness during physical intimacy-which was associated with lower sexual esteem, sexual satisfaction, and motivation to avoid risky sexual behaviors.

Given this prior research, the survey was utilized in this project as a tool to gauge women's general genital self-image and attitudes. As previously mentioned, though, every survey participant in this research scored above a 14 on a 7-28 scale. Although the numbers are higher than initially expected, the survey was only completed by 34 women, with a 32% drop out rate. Perhaps if administered on a larger scale, there might be more variation among respondents scores. Based on this small-scale preliminary evaluation,

though, women who participated in the survey had generally healthy self-image scores. Again, although the survey was not designed to determine why women feel the way they do about their genitals, further research exploring this might include the effects of pornography on genital perceptions in their design.

Again, this study serves as a small-scale, non-generalizable, preliminary study meant to serve as a jumping off point for further research. Currently, studies on women's genital routines and perceptions are few and far between. Therefore, this study can add to a small but growing body of knowledge on these particular issues for women. This study had many limitations, one of which being scale. With only four in depth interviews and thirty-four fully completed surveys, results cannot be generalized to a larger body. To add to this fact, interview respondents belonged to similar sexualities as well as social class. Of the four women interviewed, three identified as lesbian and one as bisexual. This high volume of queer women participants compared to their number in the overall population, again, makes this sample un-generalizable. Snowball sampling was the main contributor to the homogeneity of the interviewed subjects. Another issue that arose was the hesitation of women to come forward as interview subjects. Due to the nature of the topic that involves very intimate probes into sexual experiences and genital attitudes, finding women willing to interview was arduous. In fact, after completing six interviews, two of the women interviewed asked for their interviews to not be included in the final study, leaving only four interviews to pull information from. Another limitation was time. Due to the richness of information that this topic can provide, this type of project deserves the kind of time that this particular project's deadline would not allow for.

This topic deserves further research. As stated, this small-scale study is meant as a jumping off point for a much larger project. In future research, though, women as well as men should be included in the interview process. Some of the women interviewed made assumptions about men's standards and expectations of their female partners, but no men were interviewed to either confirm or deny that. I believe interviewing men would provide a fuller picture of the context in which women are altering their genitals. Another valuable route for further research could be to also include men on a similar survey measure as the genital self-image scale where they answer attitude questions about women's genitals. Of course, further research should also include a more diverse research sample. Of the four women interviewed, three were lesbians with various racial identities (white, black, and Hispanic). The bisexual interviewee identified herself as white as well. Including a more diverse pool could show patterns based on sexuality and race that something this small of a scale cannot.

REFERENCES

- Basow, S. A. 1991. "The Hairless Ideal: Women and Their Body Hair." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 15:83-96. Accessed on 15 October 2012.
http://web.ebscohost.com/login/lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=39459ce6-19e9-43ca-9156_c208bdb6331e%40sessionmgr113&vid=4&hid=113
- Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. 1997. "Chapter Four: Body Projects." *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Random House 97-8.
- Calogero, Rachel, Pina Afroditi, Lora Park, and Zara Rahemtulla. 2010. "Objectification Theory Predicts College Women's Attitudes Toward Cosmetic Surgery." *Sex Roles* 63: 32-41. Accessed on 16 October 2012.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/login/lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/detail?vid=10&hid=9&sid=bd0996a3-54cc-4ae9-915e-c1b97d24e206%40sessionmgr12&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZW9vc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=sih&AN=52691808>
- Eriksen, Shelley and Sara Goering. 2011. "A Test of the Agency Hypothesis in Women's Cosmetic Surgery Usage." *Sex Roles* 64(11/12): 888-901. Accessed on 16 October 2012.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/login/lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=bd0996a3-54cc-4ae9-915e-c1b97d24e206%40sessionmgr12&vid=9&hid=9>
- Fahs, Breanne. 2011. "Dreaded Otherness: Heteronormative Patrolling in Women's Body Hair Rebellions." *Gender & Society* 25: 451-72. Accessed on 15 October 2012.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/login/lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/detail?sid=8b508e21-1f1d-49ff-bc23-5d3a365a8091%40sessionmgr110&vid=4&hid=113>

- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Publishing. 1-16. Accessed on 05 November 2012.
- Herbenick, Debra L. 2009. "The Development and Validation of a Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Women's Genitals." *International Journal of Sexual Health* 21(3): 153-66. Accessed on 15 October 2012.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/login/lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=8b508e21-1f1d-49ff-bc23-5d3a365a8091%40sessionmgr110&vid=6&hid=113>
- Herbenick, Debra L. and Michael Reece. 2010. "Development and Validation of the Female Genital Self Image Scale." *International Society for Sexual Medicine* 7: 1822-1830. Accessed on 03 May 2013.
- Hope, Christine. 1982. "Caucasian Female Body Hair and American Culture." *Journal of American Culture* 5: 93-99. Accessed on 14 October 2012.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/login/lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=80cec654-dfd4-4429-9586-e336411c34d8%40sessionmgr114&vid=4&hid=113>
- Howson, Alexandra. 2004. "The Body in Everyday Life." *The Body in Society: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity. 16-22. Accessed on 05 November 2012.
- Lloyd, Jillian, Naomi S. Crouch, Catherine L. Minto, Creighton Lih-Mei Liao, and M. Sarah. 2004. "Female Genital Appearance: 'Normality' Unfolds." *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 2004: 122(5): 643-46. Accessed on 16 October 2012.
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/login/lynx.lib.usm.edu/doi/10.1111/j.1471-0528.2004.00517.x/abstract;jsessionid=D30E47D3FA8387322C5A2795255418C2.d04t01>

- Menzel, Jessie E. Steffanie L. Sperry, Brent Small, J Kevin Thompson, David B. Sarwer, and Thomas F. Cash. 2011. "Internalization of Appearance Ideals and Cosmetic Surgery Attitudes: A Test of the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Image." *Sex Roles* 65(7/8): 469-77. Accessed on 16 October 2012.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/login.lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=8b508e21-1f1d-49ff-bc23-5d3a365a8091%40sessionmgr110&vid=8&hid=25>
- Schick, Vanessa et al. 2010. "Genital Appearance Dissatisfaction: Implications for Women's Genital Image Self-Consciousness, Sexual Esteem, Sexual Satisfaction, AND Sexual Risk." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34(3): 394-404. Accessed on 15 October 2012.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/login.lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=8b508e21-1f1d-49ff-bc23-5d3a365a8091%40sessionmgr110&vid=6&hid=25>
- Synnott, Anthony. 1987. "Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair." *British Journal of Sociology* 38(3): 381-413. Accessed on 05 November 2012.
<http://ehis.ebscohost.com/login.lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=af593b43-eae1-4057-8fcd-7de87fa633b3%40sessionmgr11&vid=4&hid=27>
- Tiggemann, Marika. & Sarah J. Kenyon. 1998. "The Hairlessness Norm: The Removal of Body Hair in Women." *Sex Roles* 39: 873-885. Accessed 15 October 2012.
<http://web.ebscohost.com/login.lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=8b508e21-1f1d-49ff-bc23-5d3a365a8091%40sessionmgr110&vid=10&hid=25>
- Toerian, Merran, Sue Wilkinson, and Precilla Choi. 2005. "Body Hair Removal: The Mundane Production of Normative Femininity." *Sex Roles* 52 (5/6): 399-406. Accessed on 15 October 2012.

<http://web.ebscohost.com/logon.lynx.lib.usm.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=008060d1-57d5-4cae-9aa7-0f26e44071ff%40sessionmgr110&vid=4&hid=113>

APPENDIX A: Survey Instrument

Female Genital Self Image Scale

The following items are about how you feel about your own genitals (the vulva and the vagina). The word *vulva* refers to a woman's external genitals (the parts you can see from the outside such as the clitoris, pubic mound, and vaginal lips.) The word vagina refers to the inside part, also sometimes called the "birth canal" (this is also the part where a penis or tampon may be inserted.) Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement by marking an X in the corresponding box.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel positively about my genitals				
I am satisfied with the appearance of my genitals				
I would feel comfortable letting a sexual partner look at my genitals				
I think my genitals smell fine				
I think my genitals work the way they are supposed to work				
I feel comfortable letting a healthcare provider examine my genitals				
I am not embarrassed about my genitals				

APPENDIX B: Consent to Participate

Consent to Participate: Body Image and Beauty Routines Among College Women

This project seeks to examine the views held by college-aged women in Mississippi regarding their bodies and their routine beauty practices, with a particular focus on the use of genital modifications. The data collected through these interviews will provide insight into women's attitudes and experiences around a range of bodily issues and routines, and your participation is appreciated.

In sharing your views and experiences, you will contribute to this project. During the interview, you may feel stress or discomfort with discussing your thoughts about your body, especially the more private or intimate topics. If at any point a question makes you feel uncomfortable, just let the researcher know and we will skip that question or stop the interview. If you wish to stop the interview at any time, you may do so with no penalty of any kind.

The interviews will last from one to four hours, and I will be audio taping in order to have an accurate account of our conversation. . After your interview is finished, I will transcribe the recording then file it on my personal computer with no identifying information. The consent form will be kept in a locked file, along with a matching list of names and pseudonyms. Only I, Amber L. Hammons, and my faculty advisor, Dr. Amy Chasteen Miller, will have access to these files. The transcriptions will not contain your name or anything else that might identify you. All comments made during the interview will be kept completely confidential. After five years, the recordings and consent forms will be destroyed.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, the University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601). 835. 5552 or my advisor, Dr. Amy Chasteen Miller (Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS 39401) at 601-266-4636.

In conformance with federal guidelines, I need your signature to show your consent to participate in this project. The University also requires that the date and the signature of the person explaining this study to you appear on the consent form. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

APPENDIX C: Interview Schedule

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. This is a study to find out more about young women's body attitudes and beauty practices. Particularly, this study focuses on women's body hair and the various routines they go through on a daily basis. We will also be discussing routines women might go through to groom their genitals.

1. In the U.S., it's common to have a daily routine you go through to take care of your body and prepare for your day. Could you share with me a little about your daily routine—for instance, what kinds of things do you do to get your body ready to leave your house in the morning, or to go to bed in the evening?
2. Do you remove the hair from your legs? (If so, when did you start?)
3. Some women also modify hair on their face, like their eyebrows or lip area, either by waxing, plucking, or bleaching. Have you ever done that? (If so, what, when did you start, and how often do you do it?)
4. Many women today, though not all, alter their pubic hair as well by waxing, shaving, etc. Is this something you have ever done? (Why or why not?)
5. Another kind of modification some women do is more cosmetic – in terms of 'vajazzling,' bleaching, dyeing, etc.... have you ever done that?
6. In your opinion, why do most women modify the hair on their bodies?
7. A more extreme version of genital cosmetic surgery in the U.S. is cosmetic surgery that some women get in order to change the look of their labia and vagina. Have you heard of this? What are your thoughts about it?
8. Would you ever consider cosmetic surgery of the genital area? (Why or why not?) (Probe: economic constraints)
9. What would prompt a woman to take more drastic body measures, such as surgery? (probe: social pressure or intimate partner pressure)
10. Some women may alter their bodies due to intimate partner expectations. Have you ever had a sexual partner comment on your genitals? (If so, where the comments negative or positive?)
11. Have any of your sexual partners ever requested that you alter certain body parts or genitals?
12. Many women, but not all, have an idea of what the ideal vagina looks like. In your opinion, is there an ideal or normal vagina? Can you explain what that looks like? How do you know what normal standards are?
13. Based on your definition and criteria, then, do you feel that you have a normal or ideal vagina? (If so, why or why not?)
14. People enter puberty at different stages and at various ages. Could you tell me a little bit about when you first remember thinking about puberty and what you had been told about it? Could you talk a little about the first body changes you noticed and how you felt about them?
15. Did you notice any changes with your genitals specifically? (e.g. more hair)

16. Many youth go through a self-examining period during puberty. They examine their bodies during this change. Did you self examine during puberty?
17. Did you ever compare your body to those of other women? Were your genitals ever part of that comparison?
18. Thank you again for participating in this interview today. Before we conclude, I would like you to tell me some basic information about yourself.
 - i. What is your age?
 - ii. What is your gender?
 - iii. What is your race or ethnicity?

APPENDIX D: Recruitment Flyer

Body Image and Beauty Routines Among College Women Are you a woman between the ages of 18 and 24? If so, YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!

I am a University of Southern Mississippi undergraduate student in sociology completing a senior research project, and I need volunteers for a survey and for interviews. My research examines women's views about their bodies and their everyday routines for their appearance (from hairstyle to makeup and exercise). I am particularly interested in women's thoughts on social expectations for what is considered "attractive" and what they do, and want to do. I am including in my research both publicly visible areas of the body (like the face) and intimate, private areas. My research will be strengthened if a variety of women participate, so please consider taking time out of your day to share your thoughts.

My survey is completely anonymous and should take you ten minutes or less. Curious? Go to this address and answer the questions – your time is appreciated!



Additionally, if you would be willing to talk with me about your experiences, please email me at amber.hammons@eagles.usm.edu or telephone me at 601.500.0599. Over the next few months, I will be interviewing women in person, at a location of their convenience, to explore their thoughts in more depth. Your time would be greatly appreciated. All interview information will be kept completely confidential. This research has been approved by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee at the University of Southern Mississippi. If you have any questions concerning this research, please contact me or my advisor, Dr. Amy Chasteen Miller (Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS 39401) or at 601.266.4306.

Thank You!
Amber Hammons

APPENDIX E: Survey Data

Participant #	Score
1	26
2	15
3	21
4	25
5	25
6	21
7	18
8	28
9	18
10	25
11	16
12	15
13	20
14	20
15	23
16	22
17	15
18	16
19	16
20	18

Survey Data continued

Participant #	Score
21	19
22	16
23	15
24	28
25	14
26	24
27	28
28	22
29	18
30	19
31	23
32	21
33	20
34	20

APPENDIX F: IRB Approval Letter



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional-review-board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 14012103

PROJECT TITLE: Body Image and Beauty Routines Among College Women Genital Grooming and Sexual Attitudes

PROJECT TYPE: New Project

RESEARCHER(S): Hammons Amber

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts and Letters

DEPARTMENT: Anthropology and Sociology

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 01/27/2014 to 01/26/2015

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board