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## **Implications of Diverse Peer Interactions on Body Image Satisfaction and Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance Among College Students**

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IMPLICATIONS OF DIVERSE PEER INTERACTIONS ON BODY IMAGE  
SATISFACTION AND COSMETIC SURGERY ACCEPTANCE  
AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Shamekia LaBrittney Woods

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
and the Department of Educational Research and Administration  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

IMPLICATIONS OF DIVERSE PEER INTERACTIONS ON BODY IMAGE  
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by Shamekia LaBrittney Woods

December 2016

Whereas body image satisfaction and cosmetic surgery acceptance has been widely studied over the last 30 years, these topics as they pertain to college students have not been examined extensively—most notably, the implications that diverse peer interactions have on students’ body image satisfaction and their acceptance of cosmetic surgery as a means of improving body image. Diverse peer interactions refer to interactions among peers of different racial and/or cultural backgrounds. For many college students, college provides the first opportunity whereby students may interact and engage to a great extent with students from racial and cultural backgrounds different from their own. The purpose of this study was to first investigate the extent to which diverse peer interactions occur among college students and then investigate if and how diverse peer interactions influence college students’ reported body image satisfaction and views on cosmetic surgery as a means of increasing body image satisfaction. Students from nine public, non-religious affiliated higher education institutions located in the American Southeast were asked to complete an online questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale questions regarding body image satisfaction, peer/friend group characteristics, and cosmetic surgery views in addition to questions regarding participants’ demographic characteristics (i.e. race, gender, etc.). The results revealed that African American

students were the least likely of all racial groups to engage in diverse peer interactions, regardless of the racial demographics of the institutions attended by students. In regard to body image satisfaction and cosmetic surgery acceptance, no significant differences were found among study participants, regardless of race, gender, or the racial demographics of institutions.

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## DEDICATION

First and foremost, I thank my Lord and Savior for keeping me uplifted and for giving me the strength to never give up. He has guided me on this long, winding journey and directed my steps along the way. *A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.* —Proverbs 16:9

Secondly, I would like to dedicate this work to my amazing and wonderful family: Mommy, Toya, Kisha, and Tayden. Words cannot express how grateful I am for all of the love and support that you give me, and for all of the sacrifices that you have made to help me achieve my goals. You have been there every step of the way, motivating and encouraging me and pushing me forward. It has been a long journey, and I could not have made it this far without all of you. This accomplishment is as equally yours as it is mine.

Last but not least, I would also like to dedicate this work to my late father, whose memory continues to inspire me to reach for greatness. I know that you are watching over all of us and acting as our guardian angel.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CDT</i>	Cognitive Dissonance Theory
<i>EDI</i>	Equally-Diverse Institution
<i>EDI-H</i>	Equally-Diverse Institution (Hispanic)
<i>HBCU</i>	Historically Black College/University
<i>MDI</i>	Majority-Driven Institution
<i>PHI</i>	Predominantly Hispanic Institution
<i>PWI</i>	Predominantly White Institution
<i>SCogT</i>	Social Cognitive Theory
<i>SCompT</i>	Social Comparison Theory
<i>SDT</i>	Self-Discrepancy Theory
<i>SLT</i>	Social Learning Theory

## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

According to Halliwell and Dittmar (2006), self-body image is defined as one's view of his/her own body and physical appearance. The first studies on body image date back to the 1970s, with the main focus having initially been on Caucasian women and their desire for thinness (Pompper, Soto, & Peil, 2007). This primary focus on Caucasian women and body image continued for nearly three decades until the late 1990s and early 2000s, when researchers began to turn their attention to other body image-related factors including race/ethnicity, age group, and the male gender. Today, body image dissatisfaction, which is defined as a person expressing discontent with his/her physical appearance, is a widely researched topic that has been increasing in popularity among researchers as new factors related to the topic are now being studied, most notably college students (Blow & Cooper, 2014; Burlew & Shurts, 2013; Capodilupo, 2014; Sheldon, 2010).

The concept of body image is a multi-faceted and dynamic construct that consists of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and the relationship among an individual, his/her body, and his/her social environment (Calogero & Tylka, 2010; Cash, 2004; Grogan, 2010). Because adolescence and early adulthood are critical developmental periods for individuals in terms of identity and self-worth development, research suggests that college students with body image dissatisfaction are at a higher risk of experiencing anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Gillen & Lefkowitz, 2011; Koyuncu, Tok, Canpolat, & Catikkas, 2010; Paulk, Dowd, Zayac, Eklund, & Kildare, 2014; Sides-Moore & Tochkov, 2011; Woertman & van den Brink, 2012). According to some research, as many as 90% of collegiate women and 70% of collegiate men in the U.S. report some



level of body dissatisfaction (Neighbors & Sobal, 2007; Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2013).

Much of the research that has been done in regard to body image satisfaction has been focused on the mainstream media's influence on body image and beauty standards (Boyce & Kuijer, 2014; Lev-Ari, Baumgarten-Katz, & Zohar, 2014; Tiggemann, 2014). More recently, however, there has been an increasing focus on studying the effects of gender, race, culture, and environment on body image satisfaction of college students.

In the four decades of body image research, many studies have focused on women exclusively (Goswami, Sachdeva, & Sachdeva, 2012; Grogan, 2010; Latha, Hegde, Bhat, Sharma, & Rai, 2006). Body image research has consistently shown women to be more likely to report body image dissatisfaction than men (Forrest & Stuhldreher, 2007; Grogan, 2010). Likewise, research has shown that women are more likely than men to engage in unhealthy practices such as disordered eating, excessive exercise, and cosmetic surgery as a means of decreasing their body image dissatisfaction. In other words, it has been well documented by much research that women are more likely than men to experience body dissatisfaction and engage in unhealthy behaviors in order to increase their body satisfaction. Due to Western society's emphasis on the importance of "beauty" as a valued feminine characteristic, it is not surprising that women would hold themselves to a higher standard in terms of body image. Therefore, it is to be expected that in any population or subpopulation within the Western world women would report lower body satisfaction than their male counterparts.

Within the last two decades, more studies have focused on male body image satisfaction, especially among college males (Chia & Wen, 2010; Ousley, Cordero, & White, 2008). Whereas women have been found to report lower levels of body

satisfaction than men, research has shown that men are nonetheless affected by body dissatisfaction and resulting psychological-related issues like disordered eating and depression but at much lower rates than women (Chia & Wen, 2010; Ousley et al., 2008). Moreover, body image research focused on men has shown that men's body image issues are based on different beauty standards than those of women. Whereas women tend to be more concerned with thinness, men tend to be more concerned with fitness and muscularity (Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2013).

The differences between men's and women's desired physiques not only reflect Western ideals of feminine and masculine beauty but they may start to explain why women are more likely than men to report body dissatisfaction. Biologically, men tend to have naturally muscular physiques to some extent, or at least more muscular than women (Power & Schulkin, 2008). Therefore, aspiring to obtain a muscular physique is not an unattainable goal for most men. However, on the contrary, aspiring to be thin (as it is often defined or portrayed by mainstream, Western society) can be an unrealistic goal for many women, as women are biologically prone to storing adipose needed for childbearing (Power & Schulkin, 2008). In other words, whereas muscularity is more of a biological norm for men, thinness is more of a biological rarity for women—which may explain why women seeking to be thin experience body dissatisfaction more often than men seeking to be muscular. Because the body image ideals sought after by men and women are different, men and women will not be compared in this study but simply studied in conjunction with each other as they co-exist in the same studied population.

Much like body image satisfaction generally differs between men and women, the results of numerous studies on body image have shown differences in body satisfaction

based on race/ethnicity and culture (Baugh, Mullis, Mullis, Hicks, & Peterson, 2010; Blow & Cooper, 2014; Capodilupo, 2014; Greenwood & Dal Cin, 2012). However, these results have been mixed. Race and culture should not be mistaken as synonymous terms but the two concepts are interconnected. Culture is the cumulative set of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and values that distinguishes the members of one group of people from another (Hofstede, 1997). Oftentimes, these differences are most pronounced when comparing members of different racial groups. However, it is important to note that race does not always dictate culture, and culture is not always defined by race. Within any racial group, there may exist several different cultures, and vice versa. In addition to studies examining culture as based on race, numerous studies have shown that culture as based on environment can be very influential on individuals' body image views. For instance, in addition to gender and racial differences in reported body satisfaction, research has also shown that cultural differences as based on geographic location within a single country can influence body image satisfaction (Moradi & Moradi, 2010; Paulk et al., 2014). In fact, college students who represent similar populations in terms of racial diversity but reside in different regions of the U.S. have been found to report drastically different levels of body image satisfaction, and these differences have been attributed to differences in local subcultures and climates (Paulk et al., 2014). Because of these differences in geographic regions, this study will focus solely on the American southeast.

Even though race and culture are separate yet related constructs, there tends to be overarching sets of customs and values within any particular region or country that define racial and ethnic groups within that region. For example, in the U.S. and throughout the Americas, there has been much research to suggest that African American and Latina

women often subscribe to different beauty standards than those promoted by the mainstream, predominantly-Caucasian culture. Body image ideals of mainstream (Caucasian) culture promote thinness for women, whereas African American and Hispanic cultures tend to idealize fuller, curvier figures for women (Goodman, 2005). In such instances whereby women of color are more influenced by their own subcultures' beauty ideals than the beauty ideals of mainstream culture, these women have been found to report less body dissatisfaction than their Caucasian counterparts who are most strongly influenced by mainstream culture. However, there is also research to suggest that women of color are just as likely to report body dissatisfaction even when subscribing to non-mainstream beauty ideals (Hesse-Biber, Livingstone, Ramirez, Barko, & Johnson, 2010; Watson, Watson, Ancis, White, & Nazari, 2013). In these instances, researchers have found that women of color express dissatisfaction with different physical attributes than Caucasian women. While Caucasian women tend to be more concerned with thinness, women of color have been found to be more concerned with hair, skin tone, and bust/waist/hip ratios. In both cases, the fixated on body image characteristics are not easily obtainable due to biology and genetics (Power & Schulkin, 2008).

The concepts of culture and race/ethnicity become even more complex when examined from the perspective of groups that find themselves as part of the minority in any given setting. Not only do the individuals within these minority groups have cultural practices and beliefs that are derived from within their own cultural group, individuals in minority groups can come to feel pressured to assimilate the cultural beliefs and practices of the mainstream (majority) group into their own practices and beliefs when extensively

exposed to mainstream cultural ideologies (Blackwell, Poppen, & Beil, 1999; Loo & Rolison, 1986). This balancing act can be difficult and may lead to self-discrepancies as these individuals compare themselves to not only others within their own cultural group but also to others in their society's majority group. Individuals within the majority group often do not face these same issues, as they are more likely than minorities to find themselves living and socializing within a setting where their customs are shared by most others and serve as the cultural norm. Even when individuals within the majority group are exposed to the cultural ideologies of a minority group(s), the exposure may not be of significance or for extended and repetitive occurrences. Therefore, majority group individuals may not be influenced to assimilate other cultural ideologies into their own, such as in the way that individuals in minority groups may feel pressured to incorporate the ideologies of the majority group into their lives in order to find acceptance in the mainstream society (Blackwell et al., 1999; Loo & Rolison, 1986).

Depending on the student demographics of a college's population, college can level the playing field in regard to individuals from different racial and cultural minority/majority groups being exposed to each other and to different cultural ideologies. According to some research, increased exposure to individuals of other racial/ethnic or cultural groups increases the chances of college students engaging in diverse peer interactions (Blackwell et al., 1999). In fact, the idea of propinquity is that individuals are likely to interact and form relationships with individuals who share the same social situation as themselves (Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009). Therefore, it is expected that students would engage in diverse peer interactions when exposed to diverse peer groups due to their shared social situation and environment (i.e. college). For instance, a

Caucasian student who for the first time in his/her life attends an institution whereby he/she is not a part of the majority group may have his/her cultural beliefs regarding beauty challenged due to exposure to new and different cultural beliefs that he/she may not have previously been aware of or exposed to at such great lengths. It is not to say that this exposure will lead to members of one racial or cultural group wanting to take on the cultural characteristics of a different racial or cultural group. On the contrary, by simply having his/her beliefs challenged, an individual may no longer take as strong of a position or stance on an issue as he/she did before. In other words, this “challenge” might serve to lead an individual toward a different mindset and way of thinking.

For instance, a Caucasian woman who attended a predominantly Caucasian school prior to college may attend a college where (for the first time in her life) she is exposed to culturally-based body image ideals that are different from the thin ideal that most often dominates mainstream, Caucasian culture. The woman may not be influenced to pursue obtaining the defining characteristics of these different culturally-based body image ideals but she may be forced to re-evaluate the reason for her own body image beliefs, the logic behind these beliefs, and whether or not she wants to continue to hold onto these beliefs. In other words, exposure to new cultural ideas is likely to lead to self-discrepancy and an attempt to correct the discrepancy (Higgins, 1987). For example, the same hypothetical Caucasian woman may see African American women, who possess heavier, curvier physiques, expressing satisfaction and pride in their bodies. Because of this, the Caucasian woman may come to accept the notion that thinness is not the only form of feminine beauty, and thereby feel more satisfied with her body image and be less likely to strive for thinness as strongly as she may have prior to her new diverse cultural

experiences (Trottier, Polivy, & Herman, 2007). Whereas she may have been exposed to Caucasian females with heavier physiques prior to college, it is likely that those females, believing in the same thin-ideal mainstream cultural beliefs as herself, were unsatisfied with their bodies and expressed this dissatisfaction in such a way that only reinforced the woman's belief that thinness is the ideal body goal (Wasilenko, Kulik, & Wanic, 2007). Furthermore, while the woman may have been exposed to other cultural beauty ideals in the media, it is unlikely that this exposure was prolonged or extensive enough to impact her beliefs. However, in college, she may experience prolonged and extensive exposure to other cultural ideals that may result in her re-evaluating her prior beliefs.

On the contrary, however, there is counter research to suggest that mere exposure to racially or culturally diverse peers will not lead to diverse peer interactions nor the influence of other cultural ideas (Antonio, 2001; Engberg, Hurtado, & Smith, 2007). In fact, the idea of homophily suggests that mere exposure to individuals who are different does not always lead to diverse peer interactions (Stearns et al., 2009). Homophily is the idea that individuals have an inclination to interact with individuals who are similar to them in terms of certain characteristics such as age, race, and gender, and this inclination could be due to several factors or character traits that existed prior to college. Therefore, based on this ideology, exposure to different body image ideas may have no effect or may lead to some individuals becoming less accepting of their own bodies. For example, the same Caucasian female, who sees African American females expressing satisfaction with heavier, curvier physiques, may come to hold onto thin-ideal body image views even more strongly due to being exposed to cultural ideas that differ so starkly from her currently held beliefs.

The same hypothetical scenario could be examined from the perspective of a minority group female who (for the first time) finds herself in a predominantly-Caucasian environment when attending college. Even though minorities in this country are constantly surrounded by mainstream, Caucasian-dominated cultural media images, it is not a given that minorities will subscribe to these mainstream cultural ideas. Oftentimes, minorities are sequestered into predominantly minority communities and schools, and their cultures trump mainstream culture (Bowman & Denson, 2012). However, once minority individuals move away from their communities such as when attending college, these individuals are likely to experience more exposure to mainstream culture and feel pressured to live up to mainstream standards (Blackwell et al., 1999). Therefore, a minority group female attending a predominantly Caucasian institution might be affected by the surrounding thin-ideal culture and experience body dissatisfaction if she does not measure up to the thin-ideal and did not subscribe to these body image beliefs prior to college.

Because the ideal male body image seems to be mostly and almost solely concerned with muscularity regardless of racial or cultural background, the racial and cultural differences between desired body images as observed among women of different racial or cultural backgrounds have not been observed in male populations (Dakanalis et al., 2014; Pompper et al., 2007). Men tend to be most focused on fitness and muscularity regardless of race/ethnicity, culture, or even age. In fact, there have been studies on the ways that males' reported body image satisfaction changes throughout different life stages, and these studies have shown that men, regardless of race or age, tend to view toned, muscular bodies as the ideal male physique at all stages of life (Hargreaves &



Tiggemann, 2009; Pompper et al., 2007; Wasylkiw, Currie, Meuse, & Pardoe, 2010).

These studies have also shown that males' reported body satisfaction does not differ significantly across life stages.

Despite a vast number of studies on the implications of race, culture, and gender as factors on body image satisfaction, peer influence as a body image factor has been much less studied. Only within the last decade has body image research in conjunction with peer influence been studied. It is important to note that *peer* influence and *peer pressure* are not the same. Peer pressure consists of individuals being influenced by what their peers do and/or say (Burns & Darling, 2002). According to Burns and Darling (2002), peer pressure among adolescents and young adults is relatively uncommon—despite much research emphasizing it as a major contributor for youths engaging in certain activities and exhibiting certain behaviors. Instead, these researchers suggest that *peer influence* is often mistaken for *peer pressure*. Peer influence is a subtler and indirect yet very potent form of peer pressure. In contrast to *peer pressure*, *peer influence* consists of individuals being influenced by how they think their peers will react to their actions. Whereas *peer pressure* involves individuals changing their behavior to match that of their peers, *peer influence* involves individuals changing their behavior to meet the perceived expectations of others. According to Burns and Darling (2002), peer influence is most likely to occur when youths enter a new school or join a new peer group—such as entering college and being immersed in a new peer group setting of which some students may not be accustomed.

Research has provided much evidence of peer influence having a significant effect on the attitudes and behaviors of adolescents, specifically teens (Benas & Gibb,

2007; Reynolds, MacPherson, Schwartz, Fox, & Lejuez, 2014). Likewise, research suggests that college-aged young adults are also significantly influenced by peers (Hall, Cabrera, & Miley, 2011; Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, & Gurin, 2003; LaNasa, Cabrera, Transgrud, & Alleman, 2007). This influence has been most notably documented in research on college students' alcohol and drug use behaviors (Borsari & Carey, 2006). However, body image satisfaction research has also investigated peer influence among college students. When female college students have been exposed to female peers of various body sizes and fitness levels, these students have reported differing levels of body dissatisfaction based on the body sizes of the peers to which they are exposed (Forney, Holland, & Keel, 2012; Sheldon, 2010; Sides-Moore & Tochkov, 2011).

Because college students are surrounded by peers of their own age group, college represents a unique environment whereby the chances of students interacting with each other (either directly or indirectly) and making appearance-related social comparisons are high (Lindner, Hughes, & Fahy, 2008). Because of this constant exposure to and socialization with peers, some researchers suggest that the college environment exacerbates the pressure for young men and women to achieve certain beauty standards (Baugh et al., 2010). Pressure felt by college students to achieve certain beauty standards can be further intensified by their interactions and relationships with peers of other races/ethnicities, sometimes for the first time in their lives (Bowman & Denson, 2012). Whereas exposure to new and different cultural ideas can be enriching for students, it can also lead to psychological discrepancies as students try to cognitively process the way that newly observed beauty standards fit with their previously held beauty ideals, and try to fit into their new environment. One of these psychological self-discrepancies

manifests itself in the form of body dissatisfaction, which can lead to unhealthy behavioral practices such as disordered eating and other psychological disturbances such as anxiety and depression (Baugh et al., 2010; Jung & Lee, 2006; Kennedy, Templeton, Gandhi, & Gorzalka, 2004).

Although an overwhelming majority of the body image research concerning mechanisms for improving body image has focused on individuals' use of disordered eating and excessive exercise, cosmetic surgery has become a popular means of individuals enhancing their body image. Most often, individuals seek cosmetic surgery for one of two reasons: 1) to correct some physical deformity that, if left uncorrected, could negatively impact an individual's daily living, or 2) to enhance some physical aspect deemed undesirable or unacceptable by the individual. With the rate of cosmetic procedures soaring to new highs for both men and women over the last decade, it is apparent that more individuals are turning to cosmetic surgery as a way to improve their body image and hence decrease their body dissatisfaction. However, the use of cosmetic surgery as a means of reducing body dissatisfaction has been much less studied due to the taboo nature of cosmetic surgery (Swami, Taylor, & Carvalho, 2009). In fact, cosmetic surgery acceptance among college students as a means of increasing body satisfaction is an even less studied area. Within the last decade or so, cosmetic surgery has become much more societally acceptable, and researchers of body image have taken notice—choosing to further explore this societal change by investigating cosmetic surgery from a college student aspect (Delinski, 2005; Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009; Markey & Markey, 2009). Some researchers have found that, not only do college students today view cosmetic surgery as socially acceptable, but they are open to undergoing plastic

surgery themselves (Calogero, Pina, Park, & Rahemtulla, 2010; Didie & Sarwer, 2003; Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009). However, these studies are few, and have not taken into account peer influence or racial differences in students' reported levels of acceptance and likelihood of undergoing cosmetic surgery.

To date, there are no known studies showing a direct link between peer influence and cosmetic surgery acceptance among college students. However, there is a suspected indirect link as peer influence is speculated to be linked to an individual's level of body satisfaction, and level of body satisfaction has been shown to be linked to cosmetic surgery acceptance and likelihood of undergoing cosmetic surgery. Examining the implications of peer influence on college students' cosmetic surgery views could shed further light on the ways that college environments and peer interactions impact students' behaviors. If college environments and peer interactions can influence students' body image satisfaction, it serves to reason that these factors also have the potential to influence the methods that students are willing to use in order to increase their body satisfaction. After all, with many individuals in the general population no longer viewing cosmetic surgery as socially prohibited, it is likely that college students may not only view cosmetic surgery as acceptable but may also be willing to undergo cosmetic surgery themselves in order to increase their body satisfaction.

#### Statement of the Problem

It is not well understood if exposure to peers of other racial and cultural groups increases the likelihood of college students engaging in diverse peer interactions. Some research suggests that simply being in an environment where there exist opportunities for diverse peer interactions will lead to such interactions among students (Blackwell et al.,

1999; Stearns et al., 2009). On the contrary, other research suggests that college students may have a propensity to engage with individuals who are like themselves and that this homogenous tendency impedes diverse peer interactions even when the environment provides opportunity for such socialization (Fujimoto & Valente, 2012; Goldstein, 2013; Stearns et al., 2009).

Further, whereas the overall concept of body image has been studied quite extensively, little is known about several body image-related factors, most notably the influence of peers on body satisfaction. A multitude of studies have provided evidence of peer influence on college student behavior (Bowman, 2010; Pike, 2009; Yakusheva, Kapinos, & Weiss, 2011). Some studies have even examined the effects of peer comparisons on the body satisfaction of students (Forney et al., 2012; Sheldon, 2010). However, the extent to which peer interactions, specifically interactions with peers of other races or cultures, contributes to body satisfaction has not been studied.

Lastly, studies have examined the body satisfaction of women attending universities that have traditionally been racially segregated; however, the body satisfaction of women and men attending more racially diverse universities has not been studied. For instance, there is research that provides insight into the way that body image satisfaction of college females is affected when females are exposed to peers possessing different body images (i.e. thin, heavy, average) (Forney et al., 2012). However, there is no known research that has investigated the way that college students' body image satisfaction is affected when students are exposed to peers who not only possess different body images but also come from different racial or cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the lengths to which students are willing to go in order to improve their body satisfaction

has not been widely studied. Whereas it is known that some students turn to disordered eating and/or excessive exercise in order to reach and/or maintain certain body standards, college students' views on and use of physical enhancement techniques like cosmetic surgery are not yet well understood.

### Theoretical Overview

Social comparison theory, which was first developed by Leon Festinger beginning in 1954, can be considered an extension of the social constructivism paradigm. The theory of social comparison seeks to explain how and why individuals compare themselves and their beliefs to others in order to find validation and social acceptance while constructing an identity (Suls & Wheeler, 2000). While Festinger was first to coin the term “social comparison” for use in a theoretical framework, the theory’s origins can be traced back to Plato’s ideology on self-understanding and Aristotle’s philosophical teachings on individuals’ self-comparisons with others. Since Festinger originally developed the theory of social comparison, the concept of self-esteem has been introduced as a driving force behind the theory (Suls & Wheeler, 2000).

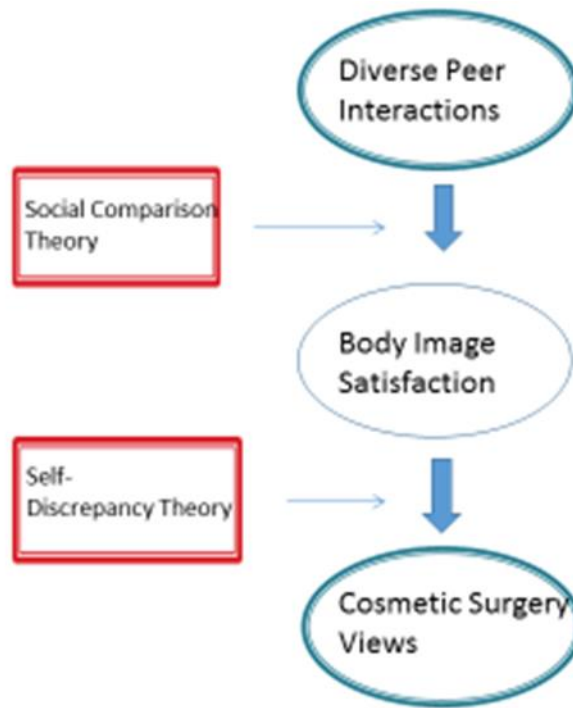
According to Festinger (1954), individuals have a natural drive to evaluate themselves by using self-comparisons to others who are similar to themselves to some extent (Wasyliw & Williamson, 2013). Much social comparison research has focused on individuals’ self-comparisons to media figures; however, research examining the effects of social comparisons to peers on body satisfaction has been limited (Bell & Dittmar, 2011). According to Goodman (2005), social comparison theory predicts that “upward” comparisons, meaning comparing one’s self to individuals who are viewed as superior in some sense, are the types of comparisons that result in low self-esteem and

body dissatisfaction. Whereas upward comparisons can provide motivation for self-improvements, these comparisons, in terms of physicality, most often lead to body dissatisfaction (Markham, Thompson, & Bowling, 2005).

If individuals are placed in an environment whereby they make upward comparisons on a daily basis, negative self-evaluations of one's body become reinforced, and a discrepancy between one's view of his/herself and his/her ideal self is created (Lindner et al., 2008). This discrepancy is the basis of Higgins's (1987) self-discrepancy theory that predicts that when individuals are faced with views and behaviors that are viewed as ideal but contradict the views and behaviors of their current state, individuals will strive to correct the contradiction (Higgins, 1987). Similar to social comparisons, self-discrepancies have been linked to psychological issues such as depression, disordered eating, and low self-esteem (Higgins, 1989). If used together, these two theories can help researchers understand how peer comparisons among college students affect students' body satisfaction as well as the measures that students are willing to take in order to correct the discrepancies in how they view themselves and how they want to be viewed by their peers.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to: 1) investigate the extent to which diverse peer interactions occur at institutions of various student population racial compositions, 2) investigate if and how diverse peer interactions influence college students' level of body image satisfaction; and 3) assess college students' views on cosmetic surgery, specifically their acceptance of and likelihood of undergoing cosmetic procedures in order to increase their body satisfaction.



*Figure 1. Linking the Constructs*

(Festinger, 1954; Higgins, 1987)

### Justification

Today's society has come to place much value on physical beauty, which explains why many individuals oftentimes feel as though the measure of their worth and success is largely based on their level of attractiveness. This is especially true for younger individuals who oftentimes feel greater pressure to conform to trends and ideals upheld by peers in their own age group. Thereby, college students are among the most vulnerable to suffering from body image-related issues. Body satisfaction has been found to lead to low self-esteem and social anxiety, which have both been linked to stress, depression, disordered eating, unhealthy sexual and alcohol behaviors, and poor academic performance among college students (DeHart, Tennen, Armeli, Todd, & Mohr, 2009; Gillen, Lefkowitz, & Shearer, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Izgic, Akyuz, Dogan, &



Kugu, 2004; Kim & Lennon, 2007; Sharma & Agarwala, 2013; Stein et al., 2001). Due to the physical and psychological health implications associated with body satisfaction among college students, it is important that institutions, specifically student affairs, residence life, and student health and counseling services, understand and address body image issues among students. Furthermore, it is important that institutions understand the way that student interactions influence students' body satisfaction and subsequent physical and psychological health.

The implications for understanding peer influence on college students' body satisfaction and associated health concerns can be used to provide vital insight into many of the physical and psychological issues of students. By examining the ways in which peer interactions contribute to body image satisfaction and the unhealthy symptoms and behaviors that are oftentimes associated with body dissatisfaction, student counseling programs at institutions can improve intervention and prevention programs, and residential life and student affairs programs can better promote healthy body image acceptance, healthy lifestyle practices, and more positive and diverse peer interactions.

Because there is an insurmountable amount of research showing that differences in reported body image satisfaction exist among individuals of different racial and/or cultural groups, it is important that race/ethnicity be considered as a factor of body image satisfaction, especially when also taking into account diverse peer interactions as a factor of reported body image satisfaction. Furthermore, few studies have examined the impact of race and peer influence on individuals' cosmetic surgery acceptance, especially among college students. Although gender groups were not directly compared during this study, it was important to study both gender groups in order to determine the diverse peer

interactions of each group and how these interactions impact individuals' reported body image satisfaction and views toward cosmetic surgery. Because previous studies have shown differences in college students' reported body satisfaction based on geographic region within the United States, only the southeastern region of the United States was studied in this research. Moreover, only traditional-aged undergraduate students (i.e. students between the ages of 18 – 24) were included in this study. Graduate students represent too diverse of a group in terms of age, and research shows that adolescents and young adults who are traditional college age (18 – 24) are most susceptible to peer influence.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following questions were addressed: 1) To what extent do diverse peer interactions occur at higher education institutions of various student population racial make-ups; 2) To what extent do diverse peer interactions influence students' levels of body image satisfaction; and 3) To what extent does the frequency of diverse peer interactions influence college students' acceptance of and likelihood of undergoing cosmetic surgery as a way to increase body satisfaction? It was hypothesized that interactions with peers of differing racial or cultural backgrounds might influence body satisfaction in both male and female students and thereby influence students' acceptance of and likelihood of undergoing cosmetic surgery as a means of increasing body satisfaction. Before investigating students' reported body satisfaction and views on cosmetic surgery, it must first be determined if and how students interact with students of different racial or cultural backgrounds. For both male and female students, it was hypothesized, based on previous research evidence and principles of propinquity, that

students attending equally diverse institutions (i.e. institutions that do not consist of an overwhelming majority of any single racial/cultural group) would engage in diverse peer interactions at higher frequencies than students attending majority driven institutions (i.e. institutions that have a single racial/cultural group as the overwhelming majority).

In regard to body satisfaction, it was hypothesized, based on prior research and principles of social comparison theory, that women (regardless of race) attending equally diverse institutions (EDI) would report higher body satisfaction than women attending majority driven institutions (MDI) where Caucasians are the majority group. On the contrary, it was also hypothesized that women attending equally diverse institutions would report similar body satisfaction as women attending majority driven institutions where African Americans or Hispanics are the majority group. In regard to men and body satisfaction, it was hypothesized that the type of institution (i.e. equally-diverse or majority-driven) attended would have no effect on male students' reported body satisfaction due to the muscular idea of masculinity that most often dominates Western male body image ideals regardless of race, culture, region, or age.

Because research on college students' cosmetic surgery views is so scarce and because research examining the indirect impact of diverse peer interactions on cosmetic surgery views (with body satisfaction as a mediating factor) has not been done, no hypotheses concerning expected differences in cosmetic surgery views were made prior to the study. However, due to principles of social discrepancy theory and the ever-increasing upward trend in cosmetic surgery procedures in America, it was expected that college students, overall, would have a positive viewpoint of cosmetic surgery as a means of increasing body satisfaction.

### Delimitations

This study was limited to traditional-age undergraduate students enrolled at four-year, non-religious affiliated public institutions in the southeastern United States.

Whereas the focus of the study was African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian students, students of other races were not excluded from the study. However, because of the racial make-up of the institutions involved in this study, the number of students of other races was expected to be few. Faculty and other non-student employees were excluded from the study. Data collected from students who identify as non-heterosexual were excluded from the analysis due to reasons further discussed in the Methodology section.

### Assumptions

The researcher assumed that study participants would respond to survey questions honestly and completely. It was also assumed that study participants would not be surveyed more than once. Furthermore, it was assumed by the researcher that faculty involved in participant recruitment and survey distribution would not forge survey data or delegate non-students to complete surveys.

### Scholarly Significance

There is much higher education research providing evidence of the ways that peer interactions among college students influence students' social and cognitive development (Bowman, 2010; Park, 2009; Presnell, Bearman, & Stice, 2004; Striegel-Moore, McAvay, & Rodin, 1986). Using body image satisfaction and likelihood of seeking cosmetic surgery as scopes of psychological areas impacted by peer interactions, this study aims to explore the ways that racially diverse peer interactions among college students impact certain areas of students' psychological development and associated

behaviors. Furthermore, by studying the impact of racially diverse peer interactions on students' behaviors, this study seeks to provide more insight into the ways in which the college environment impacts students. Information gleaned from this study could potentially help higher education institutions make campuses more integrated and inclusive for all students. Moreover, the findings of this study could potentially assist institutions with the development of campus programs that provide support to students suffering with body image dissatisfaction and related issues.

Further contributing to the field of higher education, the findings of this study could provide implications of the ways that emergence in the environment created by a four-year institution impact students' peer interactions and psychological and social development. Body image dissatisfaction has been linked to disordered eating and many other detrimental health practices among college students. In order to address these health concerns and provide support services, it is important that institutions understand the extent to which body image, diverse peer interactions, and social comparisons can influence students' behaviors.

### *Disordered Eating*

It has been estimated that as many as 30 million men and women in the United States suffer from some form of disordered eating (Wade, Keski-Rahkonen, & Hudson, 2011). As of 2005, it was estimated that 90% of individuals with an eating disorder are women between the ages of 12 and 25. According to much research, the onset of disordered eating symptoms usually occurs between the ages of 15 and 20—suggesting that college students are among the most susceptible group of individuals likely to exhibit eating disorder symptoms (Striegel-Moore & Bulik, 2007). While only a small

percentage of college students have been found to report clinical eating disorder diagnoses, an overwhelming majority of students have been found to report periodic patterns of disordered eating (Anderson, Shapiro, & Lundgren, 2003; Breines, Toole, Tu, & Chen, 2014; Dakanalis et al., 2014; Heron & Smyth, 2013; Johnson, Edwards, & Gidycz, 2015; Pinkasavage, Arigo, & Schumacker, 2015).

### *Low Self-Esteem*

Self-esteem is defined as an individual's attitude about him/herself as based on one's negative or positive self-assessment as well as one's idea of the ways in which others view him/her (Davidson & McCabe, 2005; Kim & Lennon, 2007). It is important to note that self-esteem and body satisfaction/dissatisfaction should not be confused as synonymous terms. Rather, an individual's level of body satisfaction/dissatisfaction is reflective of his/her level of self-esteem. Whereas higher levels of self-esteem have been associated with better physical and mental health, low self-esteem has been consistently linked to body dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety, stress, disordered eating, suicide, and risky health behaviors such as unsafe sexual activities, alcoholism, and illegal drug use (Kim & Lennon, 2007).

### *Social Anxiety*

Social anxiety is another health concern associated with body dissatisfaction. The typical age range for the onset of social anxiety is 10 – 16 years; however, this mental health condition has been found to worsen between the ages of 19 - 24 (Wittchen & Fehm, 2003). The most common symptom of social anxiety is an extreme fear of embarrassment or humiliation in the context of a social situation (Nordstrom, Goguen, & Hiester, 2014). This fear can be so debilitating that it oftentimes disrupts the daily

functions of individuals suffering from the disorder. Researchers have also linked social anxiety to symptoms of depression and disordered eating (Izgic et al., 2004; Stein et al., 2001). Because of the disorder's onset age range and ability to disrupt students' social and emotional adjustment to college, it is vital that researchers better understand anxiety-producing factors such as body dissatisfaction in order to better address these issues.

### *Risky Sexual Behaviors*

Body dissatisfaction has also been associated with unhealthy sexual behaviors. Whereas research has shown that college students with higher self-esteem and lower body dissatisfaction tend to engage in higher frequencies of sexual activity than do students with lower self-esteem and higher body dissatisfaction, several researchers have found that students with more body dissatisfaction are more likely than students with more positive body image views to engage in risky sexual behaviors such as multiple sexual partners, inconsistent condom use, one-night stands, and alcohol-related sexual activity (Gillen et al, 2006; Kelley, Borawski, Flocke, & Keene, 2003; Rosengard, Anderson, & Stein, 2006; Welsh, Grello, & Harper, 2006). Considering that one in four college students have a sexually transmitted disease and women between the ages of 18 - 24 have the highest rate of unintended pregnancies in the U.S., it is important that the factors influencing these health concerns be studied in hopes of reducing these statistics (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013; Finer & Henshaw, 2006).

### *Risky Drinking Behaviors*

In addition to risky sexual behaviors, low self-esteem as a result of body dissatisfaction has been linked to risky drinking behaviors among college students (DeHart et al., 2009; Korn & Maggs, 2004). These risky alcohol-use behaviors such as

binge drinking and driving under the influence usually serve as a coping mechanism for dealing with negative emotions and as a confidence booster for helping individuals with low self-esteem feel more sociable (Backer-Fulghum, Patock-Peckham, King, Roufa, & Hagen, 2011; Korn & Maggs, 2004). According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (2015), nearly 600,000 college students between the ages of 18 - 24 are unintentionally injured while under the influence of alcohol each year, and another 1,800 students are killed from alcohol-related injuries including motor vehicle accidents. Therefore, it is important that researchers further study the factors influencing increased alcohol abuse among college students in hopes of improving and extending prevention-focused awareness.

#### *Low Academic Success*

Low academic success has been cited as a secondary consequence of body dissatisfaction (Crocker & Park, 2004; Sanftner, Ryan, & Pierce, 2009; Strahan, 2003; Yanover & Thompson, 2008). In addition to evidence of female college students being at higher risk for developing body image dissatisfaction, some research suggests that female students with body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem are less academically successful than female students who report body satisfaction and greater self-esteem (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Sanftner et al., 2009; Sharma & Agarwala, 2013; Yanover & Thompson, 2008). Moreover, low self-esteem and social anxiety have both been found to predict poor grades and a higher likelihood of dropping out of college (Crocker & Park, 2004; Strahan, 2003). Because body dissatisfaction has been found to lead to social anxiety and low self-esteem, it is seen that body dissatisfaction can affect the academic performance



of college students, and this finding could have major implications for better understanding some of the academic difficulties of students.

#### Definitions

Body Esteem - Refers to an individual's evaluation of his/her physical appearance (Barlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008).

Body Image - Refers to an individual's views of his/her body; a construct that encompasses three sub-constructs: self-esteem, body satisfaction, and body esteem (Barlett et al., 2008).

Body Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction - Refers to an individual's measurement of his/her body esteem (Barlett et al., 2008).

Culture - Refers to the cumulative set of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and values that distinguish the members of one group of people from another (Hofstede, 1997).

Diverse Peer Interactions - Refers to interactions with peers of other races, ethnicities, and/or cultures (Leonard, 2013).

Equally Diverse Institutions - Refers to higher education institutions with student body populations that sustain closely balanced numbers in terms of the different racial/ethnicity groups; institutions with student populations composed of no more than 40% of any one racial/ethnic group (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2013).

Majority-Driven Institutions - Collective term used to refer to institutions with student populations that are overwhelmingly composed of one racial group (i.e. more

than 70% of any one racial group) (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2013).

Peers - Refers to individuals of the same age, environment, and/or socioeconomic status group (Reitz, Zimmermann, Hutteman, Specht, & Neyer, 2014).

Peer Interactions - Refers to direct and indirect socialization with individuals of the same age, environment, and/or socioeconomic status group (Reitz et al., 2014).

Self-Esteem - Refers to an individual's overall evaluation of him/herself (Barlett et al., 2008).

### Summary

College creates a setting for increased occurrences of social interactions among young adults (Lindner et al., 2008). Depending on the extent of racial and/or cultural diversity at universities, the social interactions in which students engage with peers may be more racially and/or culturally diverse than the social interactions among peers attending universities of different levels of racial and/or cultural diversity (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Mavoa & McCabe, 2008). With peer interactions, there comes peer influence, and the extent to which peer interactions consist of social engagement with other race peers may impact the way that peer influence affects students. One way that diverse peer interactions may impact peer influence is in the way that students experience body image satisfaction (Lindner et al., 2008; Trottier et al., 2007; Wasilenko et al., 2007).

Much research has investigated diverse peer interactions, peer influence, and body image in association with college students (Antonio, 2001; Blackwell et al., 1999; Park, 2009; Sheldon, 2010; Wasylkiw & Williamson, 2013). However, no research to date has

investigated the link between racially diverse peer interactions and body image satisfaction. Whereas research has shown that peer interactions can impact students' body image satisfaction, the extent that diverse peer interactions impacts students' body image satisfaction has not been studied extensively. Moreover, whereas research shows that low levels of body image satisfaction can lead to increased likelihood of individuals seeking cosmetic surgery, this relationship between body image satisfaction and cosmetic surgery has not been studied extensively from the perspective of college students. Furthermore, to date, the relationship among diverse peer interactions, body image satisfaction, and cosmetic surgery, in regard to college students, has not been studied. Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to investigate this relationship.

## CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Mainstream-American culture seems to have an obsession with thinness, especially in regard to women, and the nation's overt obsession with body image has been well documented and studied, dating back to the 1970s (Pompper et al., 2007). The term body image is used to refer to an individual's views of his/her body (Barlett et al., 2008). These views are based on one's own perception of his/her body as well as the way that one perceives his/her body to be viewed by others. According to Barlett et al. (2008), body image is a construct that encompasses three sub-constructs: self-esteem, body satisfaction, and body esteem. Body image as well as its three sub-constructs are all measured on a continuum ranging from completely negative views to completely positive views (Barlett et al., 2008). Whereas self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of him/herself, body esteem focuses strictly on an individual's evaluation of his/her body. For some individuals, his/her self-esteem is contingent on his/her physical appearance or body esteem (Zeigler-Hill & Noser, 2013). On the contrary, body satisfaction can be defined as an individual's measurement of his/her body esteem. Based on this conceptualization of body image, a direct and inter-dependent relationship among these three sub-constructs (i.e. self-esteem, body esteem, and body satisfaction) and the overarching construct (i.e. body image) can be seen.

Much research on body image has revealed the mainstream media's influential role in portraying thinness as an ideal beauty standard and a determinant of self-worth and societal value (Bell & Dittmar, 2011; Boyce & Kuijer, 2015; Goodman, 2005; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Park, 2009). In fact, there is a vast amount of research evidence to suggest that the media is arguably the most influential factor when it comes to shaping

mainstream Western beauty ideals (Bell & Dittmar, 2011; Dittmar, Halliwell, & Ive, 2006; Dittmar & Howard, 2004; Hill, 2011; Kilbourne, 2004). Now, more than ever, girls at very young ages are exposed to thin ideals through advertisements, toys, cartoons, movies, and television shows (Grabe & Hyde, 2009; Hill, 2011; Want, 2009). Research has shown that when exposed to thin ideals in the media girls are likely to experience body dissatisfaction and related mental health issues including low self-esteem, depression, and disordered eating (Grabe et al., 2008; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002; Want, 2009). Because girls and young women are constantly exposed to media images portraying thinness as desirable, it should not be surprising that today as many as 91% of girls and women report body dissatisfaction (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2014; Palmer, 2013). Furthermore, because of the pressure put on females to achieve certain beauty standards, females are more likely than males to base their self-esteem on physical appearance (Grossbard, Neighbors, & Larimer, 2011).

According to Kernis (2003), individuals whose self-esteem is highly contingent on some external criteria, such as physical appearance, feel self-worth only as long as they meet said criteria. Some research suggests that individuals whose self-esteem is contingent on an external force are likely to continually evaluate themselves and experience negative mental health issues such as disordered eating (Bos, Huijding, Muris, Vogel, & Biesheuvel, 2010; Crocker, 2002). When considering women in general, it is often seen that body image is a major concern for many women and that women's body image satisfaction is closely linked to their self-esteem. A study, whereby 334 women over the age of 18 were recruited via flyers and newspaper advertisements in west Tennessee and asked to complete a questionnaire on body image ideals, body shape, and

self-esteem, revealed significant relationships among these variables (Melton, 2014). The researcher found that as self-esteem decreased, so did body satisfaction. Likewise, as self-esteem increased, concerns with body shape were found to decrease (Melton, 2014). These study findings provide evidence of the interdependent relationship between self-esteem and body image satisfaction in women—showing just how important a self-concept of body satisfaction is to many women.

In studies focused specifically on women enrolled in college, women's concern with body image and the related effects are even more pronounced. According to Grabe et al. (2008), college-aged women can be especially vulnerable to body image concerns and related detrimental health outcomes. In 2008, Delinsky and Wilson studied women's weight gain, disordered eating, and dietary restraint during the first year of college. Three hundred thirty-six female students in their freshman year of college were surveyed during the fall and then again during the spring. The results of the study showed that disordered eating increased among those women surveyed during freshman year as a result of concern about weight gain. Another contributing factor to this increase in disordered eating was speculated to be due to women comparing themselves to their surrounding female peers (Delinsky & Wilson, 2008).

Much of the discussion in this research focuses on the relationship between women and body image, and rightfully so since most of the research to date that has been done on body image has focused almost exclusively on women. There has not been much research in the field that focuses on men, especially men of different races/ethnicities. In fact, when body image research became popular in the mid-1980s, many researchers believed that body dissatisfaction was a problem that solely affected

Caucasian females in Western cultures (Grabe & Hyde, 2006). Today, it is known that this assumption is incorrect. Individuals of both genders and of any race and/or culture can experience and be affected by body image dissatisfaction (Grabe & Hyde, 2006). In fact, the most recent research on body image shows that race and/or culture can serve as a major factor in influencing individuals' body image satisfaction and views (Baugh et al., 2010; Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Lee & Vaught, 2003; Pompper & Koenig, 2004). Therefore, it serves to reason that exposure to new cultural ideologies could influence individuals' body image satisfaction and views, especially in regard to students in college settings where such exposure occurs among students through peer interactions (Pompper & Koenig, 2004).

Even though young women are more likely than young men to report body dissatisfaction, men too can be affected by body image issues (Gillen, 2007). The same as girls are exposed to thin ideals starting at a young age, so too are young boys exposed to unrealistic and unattainable muscular images in the form of action figures and cartoon characters (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). Whereas men have been found to be less susceptible than women to body image concerns and related psychological health issues, men are not immune to these same concerns altogether (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Rade, & Jaberg, 2001; Ricciardelli, McCabe, Williams, & Thompson, 2007; Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004). Over the last 20 years, the number of males diagnosed with an eating disorder has increased significantly (Pompper et al., 2007). It was estimated that two decades ago one male was diagnosed for every 10 females diagnosed. Today, it is estimated that one male is diagnosed for every 4 females diagnosed.

While mainstream culture in America idealizes thinness as an ultimate beauty characteristic in women, muscularity is most often emphasized as the epitome of male beauty (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004; Morrison, Morrison, & Hopkins, 2003; Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2004; Tiggemann et al., 2007). Whereas women tend to be most concerned with their hips, busts, and waists, men tend to be most concerned with their chests, stomachs, and shoulders. Just as women with body dissatisfaction are susceptible to suffering from psychological health disorders, men with body dissatisfaction have also been found to suffer from depression and engage in disordered eating, consumption/addiction to diet pills and enhancement drugs, excessive exercise, and cosmetic surgery (Barlett et al., 2008; Cafri, Strauss, & Thompson, 2002; Choi, Pope, Olivardia, & Cash, 2002; Olivardia et al., 2004). Therefore, it is important that the relationship between men and body image be studied, especially in a study such as this where peer influence and race/culture are examined as key factors.

#### College Environment: Breeding Grounds for Peer Influence, Social Comparisons, and Body Image Issues

College campuses are environments that foster occurrences of peer influence and appearance-related social comparisons (Lindner et al., 2008). College students are constantly surrounded by peers of their own age group—increasing the chances for social comparisons to be made as students interact with each other either indirectly or directly. When young adults leave home for college, their peers fill the role of parents as a significant influencer in college students' identity formation. Therefore, instead of parents serving as students' primary guides for decision-making, peers come to serve as the primary guiding figures in each other's lives. When college students look to peers as



guiding figures and seek acceptance and validation from them as well, they often compare themselves to their peers. If students make these comparisons and come to the realization that their actual selves do not match that of the peers to whom they look to for guidance, acceptance, and validation, students will seek to correct the self-discrepancy.

In addition to serving as an environment whereby young adults may interact extensively with others in their own age group, college provides students with an environment whereby they may interact with and form relationships with peers of diverse races/ethnicities, oftentimes for the first time in their lives (Bowman & Denson, 2012). In fact, many studies have found that college students spend much time socializing with peers of differing races than their own (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Espenshade, Radford, & Chung, 2009; Fischer, 2008; Park, 2012; Park & Kim, 2013; Park, Denson, & Bowman, 2013; Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007; Saenz, 2010). These multicultural interactions can be enriching and enlightening for students, especially during the identity formation stage of development that most traditional-aged college students undergo. However, these new cultural experiences can also lead to personal psychological discrepancies, as students may be forced to re-evaluate many of their views, beliefs, and perspectives.

Oftentimes, individuals grow up in racially and culturally self-segregated environments, despite efforts to keep communities and schools integrated (Mavoa & McCabe, 2008). Therefore, for many young adults, a racially and culturally diverse college campus can serve as the first environment in which they may interact with individuals of different cultures. According to Allport (1954), interactions between individuals from different groups is more likely to occur if: 1) these groups are provided

an opportunity to interact in situations where all groups and members are of equal status; 2) groups work to achieve a goal that requires a collaborative effort; and 3) recognized authority figures explicitly express support of diverse peer interactions. In regard to higher education, a goal that can only be achieved through a collaborative effort might be representing the institution in a positive light or supporting the football team on its route to a national championship.

The enactment of federal laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Affirmative Action represents authoritative support for diverse peer interactions, and has helped to increase opportunities in higher education whereby individuals from different racial and cultural groups may interact. Unfortunately, even with support for diversification, many communities in the nation continue to be racially, culturally, and socioeconomically self-segregated (Stearns et al., 2009). On the contrary, higher education has experienced an increase in diversification in the last 40 years as the Asian American and Hispanic populations in the U.S. have increased. Between 1976 and 2010, the number of African Americans enrolled in higher education increased from 9% to 14%, while the number of Asian American students in higher education increased from 2% to 6%, and the number of Hispanic students increased from 3% to 13% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). At the same time, the number of Caucasian students decreased from 85% to 61%.

Despite the recent diversification of higher education, many institutions remain majority-driven—reducing the chances of diverse peer interactions to occur. In order to help understand student behaviors such as those concerning diverse peer interactions, Vincent Tinto's research on student retention and learning communities can be applied to numerous aspects of student development in higher education environments. Tinto

defines social integration as relationships between students that are created outside the classroom, and he defines academic integration as students' intellectual proceedings (Tinto, 1975, 1993). It is most often easy for students to form in-class relationships with peers as doing so can be viewed as a necessity or requirement in order to advance academically. However, it is the relationships that students form outside of class and academic motivations that represent the true social integration of an institution.

The concept of social integration into college can be a difficult process for many students, especially for those who find themselves in the minority group of an institution's student population. According to Tinto (1987), the campus culture (i.e. attitudes, beliefs, traditions, values, etc.) of an institution is established by the institution's mainstream or dominant group. Therefore, students, particularly minority students, who identify with some subculture that differs from the overall institutional culture are likely to feel isolated from the institution's mainstream and their peers (Blackwell et al., 1999; Loo & Rolison, 1986). These feelings of alienation and failure to socially integrate can lead to several different negative student outcomes. In terms of body image, social integration, or a lack thereof, could have different effects. Students attending institutions with high social integration in terms of race, culture, and gender are more likely to be exposed to cross-cultural views of beauty and body image that are more accepting of diverse body types and sizes than the body image ideals often portrayed by the mainstream, and thereby may experience higher body satisfaction than students attending institutions that have been less successful at socially integrating in terms of race, culture, and gender.

In order for students to engage in diverse peer interactions, institutional campuses must be diverse environments that promote and provide opportunity for such interactions. Research suggests that being in the minority group of an institution increases students' likelihood and opportunity to engage in diverse peer interactions—much more so than the majority group—simply due to the numbers (Antonio, 2001; Blackwell et al., 1999). In other words, if a jar contains 100 blue marbles and only 20 red marbles, the red marbles have a greater chance of touching a blue marble than the blue marbles have of touching a red marble. Colleges, for the most part, have become more racially integrated (Saenz, 2010). Unfortunately, it is known that simply being in a diverse environment and having opportunities to engage in diverse peer interactions does not always lead to such socialization.

Even with the diversification of higher education, there are two main factors that can hinder diverse peer interactions on college campuses from occurring: 1) sufficient institutional diversity for interaction opportunities and 2) pre-college attitudes, experiences, and upbringing (Antonio, 2001; Engberg et al., 2007; Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003). An individual's experiences and attitudes prior to college may be the biggest factor in determining that individual's likelihood and extent of engaging in diverse peer interactions (Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002; Saenz et al., 2007; Schofield, Hausmann, Ye, & Woods, 2010). Prior to college, many students likely live in residential areas and attend schools that are racially segregated (Joyner & Kao, 2000; Mouw & Entwisle, 2006). Therefore, college oftentimes provides the first opportunity for some students to engage in diverse peer interactions. When entering college, students bring with them the beliefs and attitudes learned during their

upbringing. Despite the advancement of social equality, some college students still hold prejudices against individuals representing certain differing groups (Blackwell et al., 1999). It is these prejudices that may prevent students from engaging in diverse peer interactions.

Similarly, because of individuals' backgrounds, it has been suggested that individuals tend to feel more comfortable socializing with other individuals from their own demographic group, and therefore may self-segregate themselves accordingly (Blackwell et al., 1999). This is often especially true in regard to race and for individuals who grew up in environments whereby there existed racial group enclaves. The more time that individuals spend in these enclaves, the more likely they are to be influenced by the shared cultural beliefs of the group, and the less likely they are to engage in diverse peer interactions (McCabe, 2011; Park, 2012; Park & Kim, 2013; Park et al., 2013). The tendency to surround oneself with others who represent the same racial or cultural group has led to the self-segregation observed in neighborhoods and schools today, and it is self-segregation of neighborhoods and schools that further fuels the tendency of individuals to self-segregate based on race or culture in environments outside of residential neighborhoods (e.g. work, college, etc.)—a continuous, cyclic process.

Homophily is the idea that individuals have a tendency to interact and form relationships with others who are similar to themselves in terms of race, age, and/or socioeconomic status (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). This idea is especially pronounced during childhood when individuals tend to gravitate toward peer groups that are homogenous in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. As adolescents get older, however, this homogeneity of peer groups usually diminishes until

young adulthood when peer groups become much more integrated (Reitz et al., 2014).

Based on the idea of homophily, the concept of self-segregation into enclaves based on demographic characteristics like race is understood. In other words, even when placed in diverse environments like many college campuses, students may not engage in diverse peer interactions but may instead choose to socialize primarily with other individuals who are similar to themselves in terms of demographic characteristics.

In contrast to homophily, the concept of propinquity is that individuals have a propensity to interact and form relationships, not with individuals who share similar characteristics with themselves, but with individuals who share the same social situation, setting, or environment (Blau & Schwartz, 1984; Quillian & Campbell, 2003). Based on this idea, it would be expected that college students (who do indeed share the same social setting and environment in that they reside and study on the same campuses) would be likely to engage with each other regardless of race, gender, etc. In fact, according to contact theory, individuals have an increased likelihood of forming relationships with others when the individuals are placed in the same social setting or environment (Stearns et al., 2009).

Whereas homophily is determined by an individual's life experiences, family upbringing, and personal choices, propinquity is largely determined by the policies and features of an institution (e.g. diversity of an institution) in addition to personal choices (Moody, 2001). However, the fact that both concepts are dictated in part by an individual's personal choices illustrates the influential and complex interplay between homophily and propinquity. An individual's level of homophily can alter his/her level of propinquity, and vice versa. Thereby, it is further understood how diverse environments

can result in opportunities for diverse peer interactions but may not always. Some research has addressed the issue of diverse peer interactions in regard to homophily and propinquity.

In terms of African American students attending predominantly-Caucasian institutions (PWIs), some research suggests that African American students are more likely than their Caucasian peers to engage in diverse peer interactions due to propinquity (i.e. sharing a social environment) and sheer numbers (e.g. marbles in a jar analogy). However, there is also research to suggest that, due to homophily, some African American students attending PWIs exhibit “cocooning” behavior (Tatum, 1987). In other words, some African American students attending PWIs feel more comfortable seeking out others who resemble themselves when attempting to acclimate to the new environment whereby they are in the minority group. According to Stearns et al. (2009), the homophily and “cocooning” behavior exhibited by minority students could be due to either direct or indirect discrimination by students in the majority group. Because students in the majority group may be more likely to form same-race friendships, minority students may be predisposed to also forming same-race peer relationships.

A college aspect that has the potential to increase propinquity among students and thereby promote diverse peer interactions is residence halls (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950; Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2006). There is evidence to suggest that students who have roommates of other races and/or cultures are more likely to engage with students of other races and/or cultures (Bowman & Denson, 2012; Carmago, Stinebrickner, & Stinebrickner, 2010; Fischer, 2008; Park & Kim, 2013; Stearns et al., 2009). A college aspect that has been found to limit diverse peer interactions is

membership in a fraternity or sorority (Park, 2012; Park & Kim, 2013; Stearns et al., 2009). Because Greek organizations at colleges are often racially homogenous, students involved with these groups are less likely to engage in diverse peer interactions; this is especially true for Caucasian students (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Miley, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Park & Kim, 2013).

According to Baugh et al. (2010), college campuses can exacerbate the pressure for young women to achieve certain beauty standards, and this increased pressure increases the risks of young women in college developing an eating disorder or suffering from some other psychological disorder. In fact, research shows that young women are more likely to diet and become weight conscious if they perceive their friends to be weight conscious (Wasyliw & Williamson, 2013). There is also research to suggest that young women can be influenced by their peers simply through making non-conversational self-comparisons to their peers (Wasyliw & Williamson, 2013). Trottier et al. (2007) conducted a study whereby it was found that self-comparisons to thin peers led undergraduate females who were dieting to adopt even more stringent restrained eating practices. On the contrary, however, when dieters compared themselves to overweight peers, students tended to view their appearances more positively. Therefore, it was determined that, in the same way that self-comparisons to thin peers can lead to lowered body satisfaction in women, self-comparisons to overweight peers can lead to improved body satisfaction (Trottier et al., 2007).

Based on these findings, the notion that exposure to the differing body image ideals of other cultures could result in individuals developing more positive self-body image views starts to make sense. It could be that simply being in a diverse environment



promotes comparisons with individuals of other races and/or cultures. It could also be that actual, direct interactions with diverse peers further promotes comparisons to other race and/or culture individuals. When students in the study were exposed to peers representing traditional, thin body image ideals of the mainstream, Western culture, students experienced lowered body image satisfaction. However, when exposed to peers representing non-traditional body image ideals as often held by non-mainstream cultures, students were more accepting of their own self-images. Although the findings of the study by Trottier et al. (2007) seem to support the hypothesis that diverse cultural exposure can lead to college students experiencing heightened body image satisfaction, the results of some other studies like that of Wasilenko et al. (2007) seem to contradict this idea in certain ways.

In a study that put both the Social Comparison Theory (SCompT) and Self-Discrepancy Theory (SDT) to the test, Wasilenko et al. (2007) investigated the effects of peer exposure on women's reported body satisfaction. Five hundred forty-five female undergraduate students were assigned to exercise on various gym apparatuses. Participants were also assigned to have a peer who was either thin or overweight exercising within view on a nearby gym apparatus as the participants exercised. In addition, there was a control group of participants who were not exposed to a peer while exercising. Results showed that women who exercised in view of a thin peer reported significantly lowered body satisfaction than women in the control group who exercised without a peer in view. These findings show that social comparisons to peers can affect female students' body satisfaction. By simply exposing participants to "thin ideal" peers, they reported lower body satisfaction than participants who were not exposed to the "thin

ideal” image. These results coincide with those of Trottier et al. (2007). However, contrary to the findings of Trottier et al. (2007), women who exercised in view of an overweight peer did not report higher body satisfaction than participants in the control group, as researchers had predicted. However, it was found that women exposed to an overweight peer while exercising worked out for longer durations of time than participants in the control group (Wasilenko et al., 2007). These findings seem to suggest that exposure to cultural body image ideals that do not conform to the mainstream Western thin-ideal would not improve body image self-perception among college women.

It is important to note that the study by Wasilenko et al. (2007) was comprised predominantly of Caucasian female students attending a predominantly Caucasian institution. Because mainstream, Caucasian-dominated culture idealizes thinness as the preferred body image for women, it is understandable that participants in the study would be more likely to report body dissatisfaction when exposed to thin peers than when exposed to overweight peers. After all, in these participants’ frame of reference, thinness is to be desired whereas being overweight is not. The fact that participants exposed to overweight peers during the study were found to work out for longer durations than the control group participants suggests that these female students were so indoctrinated to pursue thinness that even the mere sight of the opposite representation inspired them to strive for thinness even more. Therefore, the findings of this study show just how impactful extended exposure to one racial/cultural idea can be.

A study by Lindner et al. (2008) investigated the effect of female-to-male ratio on female college students’ likelihood of engaging in self-comparisons to female peers and

disordered eating. According to Lindner et al., predominantly-female colleges may intensify appearance-based social comparisons and unhealthy weight management practices. Lindner et al. postulate that this high rate of social comparisons at predominantly-female institutions could be due to two things: 1) the high concentration of females increasing the chances or opportunities to engage in social comparisons with other females, which suggests that propinquity may be an influential factor in the occurrences of social comparisons, and 2) the low concentration of males making females at these institutions more competitive for male attention and thereby more likely to compare themselves to other females who they may view as competition (Lindner et al., 2008). This idea of competitiveness for male attention suggests that sexual attraction could be an influential factor in body image-related social comparisons among females. In other words, if college women make body image comparisons to female peers based on some set of physical characteristics which they believe males find sexually attractive, it may be that the body satisfaction of college women is influenced by the desire to be perceived as attractive by the opposite gender.

In order to test this hypothesis, Lindner et al. (2008) surveyed one hundred twenty-seven female college students from three different colleges of varying female-to-male ratios. Participants were asked to complete questionnaires regarding their engagement in appearance-based self-comparisons to others and disordered eating. As researchers had predicted, it was found that females attending the predominantly female college reported the highest rate of social comparisons and disordered eating. However, the differences observed between institutions in regard to social comparison and disordered eating rates was only significant when comparing the predominantly-female

institution ( $M = 48.30$ ,  $SD = 11.26$ ) to the predominantly-male institution ( $M = 39.21$ ,  $SD = 9.40$ ), and when comparing the gender-equal institution ( $M = 46.40$ ,  $SD = 9.39$ ) to the predominantly-male institution. When the predominantly-female institution was compared to the gender-equal institution, the differences were not significant—suggesting that competitiveness for male sexual attention may not be as influential to social comparisons among college females and thereby may not be as influential to the body image satisfaction of college females as hypothesized. Researchers also found a strong positive correlation between occurrences of self-comparisons and level of disordered eating. In other words, participants who reported high frequencies of comparing themselves to peers also reported high levels of disordered eating. Another interesting finding of the study was that participants' levels of disordered eating and self-comparisons were not correlated with participants' actual weights. In other words, thin participants were just as likely as overweight participants to self-compare to others and suffer from some form of disordered eating (Lindner et al., 2008).

Like the studies by Trottier et al. (2007) and Wasilenko et al. (2007), the institutions involved in the study by Lindner et al. (2008) were all predominantly Caucasian—meaning that race and/or culture was not considered as a major factor. The findings by Lindner et al. (2008) that thin participants were just as likely as overweight participants to suffer from some form of disordered eating aligns with the findings of Wasilenko et al. (2007) and shows that women who subscribe to the thin ideal body image continue to strive for “thinness” even if they are already considered thin by health standards. Although peer influence due to social comparisons was examined as the main

factor impacting body image satisfaction in all three studies, a major aspect of all three of these studies that was not taken into account was the influence of race and/or culture.

### Peer Influence and Its Effect on Body Image

Unlike peer pressure which is often direct and consists of individuals changing their behavior in order to match that of their peers, peer influence is most often indirect and consists of individuals changing their behavior to meet the expectations of how they believe their peers will react to their own actions (Burns & Darling, 2002). Hutten (2010) refers to peer influence as a “contagion” that cannot be explained by direct interaction and communication alone. In support of this idea, he goes on to state that individuals can experience this “contagion” even when individuals do not engage in conversation with each other or even know each other. Thereby, Hutten rationalizes that, in addition to direct socialization and communication, peer influence is also dictated by indirect contact involving self-comparison with other individuals. Comparisons to peers can be viewed as a form of indirect peer influence that can impact college students’ body satisfaction and likelihood of undergoing cosmetic surgery in order to increase their body satisfaction and feel more in sync with the body images they see represented by peers.

According to SCompT, a parent theory of SDT, individuals are driven to self-evaluate and thus seek standards to which they may compare themselves as a means of assessment (Festinger, 1954). When objective criteria are not present, individuals tend to use those who surround them in their social environment as comparative standards. If a discrepancy between a person’s self and those to which he/she compares him/herself arises, the individual will strive to narrow the gap between the discrepancy—the fundamental idea of SDT (Higgins, 1987). From this perspective, it can be seen how

SCompT and SDT intertwine to help explain and understand the complex interplay among peer influence, the development of body image issues and related psychological disorders in college students, and the likelihood of college students undergoing cosmetic surgery as a means of self-improvement. (These theories will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.) When college students use social comparisons to peers as criteria for evaluating their own body image satisfaction, self-discrepancies can arise—which is in accordance with postulations made by Festinger and Higgins in their theories that aim to explain how social interactions influence individuals’ behaviors.

With the advent and growing popularity of social media websites, opportunities for self-comparisons to other has increased more than ever, and the influence that peers have over each other is just as prevalent today as ever, especially among adolescents and young adults who use social media. In the past, much research focused on the influence of traditional media outlets (i.e. television, magazines, etc.) on adolescents and young adults in regard to body image. Today, traditional media outlets such as television and magazines have taken a backseat to social media for younger demographic groups. According to recent research, television viewing and magazine reading has declined substantially among individuals in the U.S. who are between the ages of 12 and 30 (Stelter, 2012). As television viewing and magazine reading continues to decline among college-aged adults today, social media use and photo-sharing among individuals in this same age range has increased exponentially—suggesting that young adults today are significantly influenced by social comparisons to peers when it comes to body image (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Perloff, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2015). In 2014, it was estimated that as many as 89% of 18 – 30 year olds in America used

social media websites, and 79% shared photos of themselves online (Duggan, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2015).

There is much evidence supporting the idea that self-comparisons to traditional media figures who serve as models of the mainstream culture's beauty standards result in negative self-evaluations and body dissatisfaction. Both Botta (2000) and Harrison (2000) argue that internalization of body image ideals promoted by the media leads to social comparisons. When individuals compare themselves to traditional media images and internalize media beauty depictions as ideal standards, they often strive to meet the oftentimes unattainable and unrealistic standards. In other words, self-discrepancy arises due to social comparisons. Although the association between social comparisons to traditional media figures is understood, it is unclear how or if self-comparisons to peers (either in-person or via social media) contribute to individuals' desire to achieve unrealistic physical appearance goals. It is possible that self-comparisons to peers emphasize the pressure already faced by young adults to achieve certain beauty standards in order to feel accepted, desirable, and valued in society. According to findings by Goodman (2005), media images indirectly influence body image satisfaction; however, this influence is mediated through peers.

Peers are defined as individuals of the same age, environment, and/or socioeconomic status group (Reitz et al., 2014). Based on this definition, college students are considered a peer group. According to Fletcher (2015), research on the ways in which peers influence individuals' choices is a large and ever-growing topic of interest. Although much of the research on peer influence has focused on adolescents, there is also research to suggest that peer relationships continue to be influential well into

adulthood (Buote et al., 2007). In the case of college students, especially those students who reside on campus, peers make up the vast majority of their social networks (Hays & Oxley, 1986). In terms of body image, there is research to suggest that friends or peers can be very influential in the ways that young girls and women view their physical appearances (Graverner, Haedt, Heatherton, & Keel, 2008). According to Steinberg (2008), social comparisons to peers are important to the social development of adolescents and young adults, and social media provides the perfect medium for making social comparisons. In fact, some research suggests that comparisons to peers can lead to lower body satisfaction than comparisons to more traditional media figures like professional models and actors/actresses (Cash, Cash, & Butters, 1983). Therefore, based on this research and the social media and photo-sharing craze whereby individuals seek approval from their peers in the form of “likes” and “retweets” regarding their appearance, it is seen just how influential peer groups are to young adults such as college students.

Peer influence can be thought of as a social effect. There are three types of social effects that can be observed between individuals and groups: endogenous, contextual, and correlated (Fletcher, 2015). Endogenous effects occur when an individual’s behavior varies with the behaviors of the influencing group. Contextual effects are also known as exogenous effects and occur when an individual’s behavior varies along with the exogenous characteristics (e.g. environment) of the influencing group. When individuals belonging to the same group share similar characteristics, behave similarly, and/or reside in similar environments, this is known as correlated effect (Fletcher, 2015). College



students are likely to experience all three forms of social effects at some point during their academic careers.

Peer influence can also be considered as a form of “modeling.” Quiles, Quiles, Pamies, Botella, and Treasure (2013) define “modeling” as the replication of behaviors seen performed by others. Because college students are constantly surrounded by peers—individuals of the same age group and environment—who serve as “models” of certain behaviors, it serves to reason that students would be influenced by their peers. It has been postulated that social reinforcement in the form of “modeling” could indirectly promote body dissatisfaction when susceptible individuals are recurrently exposed to and make social comparisons to individuals who match certain idealized beauty standards and/or practice unhealthy behaviors in an attempt to acquire such standards (Quiles et al., 2013). In other words, students in the racial or cultural minority group(s) of an institution may experience self-discrepancy and body dissatisfaction due to exposure to majority group peers who embody body image ideals that differ from those upheld and/or possessed by the majority group(s). On the contrary, however, “modeling” could serve to promote body satisfaction if students are exposed to a variety of body images and do not feel pressured or influenced to possess the body image ideals of a single, dominate group. From this perspective, social comparison would not be expected to lead to self-discrepancy.

Some research suggests that peers may have a stronger influence over adolescents than family does, with peer influence increasing during college as individuals become young adults (Park, 2009; Presnell et al., 2004; Striegel-Moore et al., 1986). However, despite an extensive body of research showing the importance of peer influence on

adolescents and young adults, little research has investigated peer influence in the context of body satisfaction. According to some research, peer influence to possess certain body image ideals is more influential than influence from family, media, or romantic partners (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005; Presnell et al., 2004). In fact, some research shows that females are at increased risk of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating when influenced by peers who are hyper weight conscious and exhibit disordered eating behaviors (Allison & Park, 2004; Carlson-Jones, 2004). For instance, Stice, Maxfield, and Wells (2003) conducted a study in which they found that undergraduate women experienced lowered body satisfaction after hearing a thin woman complain about her weight and express desire to lose weight. The findings of this study provide further evidence of the ways in which peers indirectly influencing each other.

Whereas research suggests that peer influence is correlated with body dissatisfaction in young women, it is still unclear whether or not young women feel dissatisfied with their bodies because they feel influenced by peers through nonverbal cues to meet certain idealized beauty standards or if young women feel more drawn to peers who are weight conscious (Shomaker & Furman, 2007). From this standpoint, the issue of peer influence on body dissatisfaction is similar to the long-debated question of whether the chicken or the egg came first. In other words, it could be that peer influence is one of the many causative factors linked to individuals' development of body dissatisfaction, or it could be that individuals with a pre-existing propensity for body dissatisfaction tend to seek out (whether consciously or unconsciously) other individuals who either represent the ideal body image which they desire for themselves or are just as body conscious and dissatisfied as themselves.

According to Tiggemann and McGill (2004), women who have a tendency to compare themselves to thin media images also tend to compare themselves to peers in their environment. These findings suggest that women who enter college with a predisposition of being body image sensitive may experience hyper-sensitized body image concern due to increased opportunities for engagement in self-comparisons to peers. In other words, college campuses may serve as environments that exacerbate the likelihood of making social comparisons to peers for individuals who enter college already predisposed to comparing themselves to media images and who may suffer from body image issues prior to college.

#### Culmination of Race, Culture, the College Environment, and Diverse Peer Interactions

In many ways, college and its environment comprise a subculture. Heine (2008) defines culture as a group of people who live according to some shared context. Culture is a collective programming of the mind and a way of life acquired over the course of generations by a group who have shared similar strife and experiences (Hofstede, 1997). It is a behavior taught through social learning both consciously and unconsciously. The theory of cultural determinism states that there is no universal “right way” of doing or seeing things but that an individual’s perception of the “right way” is determined by “our way”—the way that one society or group does or sees things versus the way that another group does or sees. Two versions of this theory exist: the optimistic version and the pessimistic version. The optimistic version states that individuals can choose their ways of life (i.e. beliefs, values, etc.). In other words, individuals can choose a culture to join. Based on this version of the theory of cultural determinism, it is seen how college

students might be influenced by cultures different from the one into which they were born. If given the choice, students might choose to abandon the cultures of their upbringings in order to adopt the culture of their colleges.

On the contrary, the pessimistic version of the theory states that individuals can only be what they are conditioned to be. In other words, individuals cannot choose their culture; they are bound to the beliefs, values, and traditions of the culture into which they are born. Based on this version of the theory, it would not be expected for college students to be influenced by cultures different from their own. Even when presented with new cultural ideas, students would cling to the cultures of their upbringing. Hence, the optimistic version of the theory of cultural determinism seems to align with the idea of propinquity, whereas the pessimistic version of the theory seems to align with the idea of homophily.

According to Hofstede (1997), there are several layers of culture, and race/ethnicity is one of these levels. Whereas individuals of the same race/ethnicity do not always share the same culture, it is likely that individuals of the same race/ethnicity who also share other cultural levels (i.e. national, regional, gender, generational, etc.) will identify with the same or similar culture. Therefore, individuals from the same culture are likely to internalize the same or similar beauty ideals. A study by Paulk et al. (2014) on college students and body image found that students in the American Southeast reported lower body satisfaction than students in the Pacific Northwest did—suggesting that even regional cultural differences can alter individuals' views on beauty and body image. Understanding even subtle differences in body image-related factors can help

identify specific populations to be targeted for healthy body image promotion and outreach.

Much of the research done on body image has focused on race/ethnicity as a factor—primarily focusing on Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic women. However, even with such vast amount of research on body image from a racial perspective, researchers in the field have been unable to reach any clear consensus on exactly how race influences an individual's body image satisfaction. Whereas some research seems to suggest certain relationships between race and body image satisfaction, other research contradicts such conclusions. Due to the negative health outcomes associated with body dissatisfaction including depression, disordered eating, and low self-esteem, it is important that researchers better understand the social issue, especially when it comes to better identifying groups most at risk of experiencing these issues.

Early researchers of body image and disordered eating as a means of weight management considered African American women to be insusceptible to mainstream culture's thin ideal beauty standards (Gordon, Castro, Sitnikov, & Holm-Denoma, 2010). Indeed, several studies have found evidence to suggest that African American women report less body dissatisfaction and lower rates of disordered eating than Caucasian women (Grabe & Hyde, 2006). Other studies have found contrasting results that suggest that African American women are just as susceptible to body image concerns as their Caucasian counterparts if they identify with mainstream thin ideal beauty standards (Roberts, Cash, Feingold, & Johnson, 2006). Some studies even suggest that African American women who have internalized mainstream culture's beauty standards have higher rates of disordered eating than Caucasian women (Gilbert, Crump, Madhere, &

Schutz, 2009). Still, other studies provide evidence to suggest that disordered eating in African American women is not predicted by African American women's internalization of mainstream beauty ideals (Watson et al., 2013). Because of these inconclusive and conflicting findings regarding body dissatisfaction in African American women, it is important that researchers explore other factors that could potentially explain the heterogeneity of findings on the subject (Watson et al., 2013).

According to Greenwood and Dal Cin (2012), African American women tend to report higher self- and body-esteem and lower body surveillance than Caucasian women. However, this assumption may only be true in regard to African American women who identify with African American culture and beauty standards over predominantly-Caucasian mainstream beauty standards. According to Lovejoy (2001), African American women have higher body satisfaction than Caucasian women because African American women embrace different beauty standards than the mainstream. His reasoning is that, because African American women are less adherent to mainstream beauty standards in terms of body size and shape than Caucasian women, African American women are less likely to strive to meet thin ideal standards.

A study on the relationship between racial identity and body surveillance or continual evaluation collected data from 278 undergraduate African American women and found that when African American women identified with mainstream culture, they experienced increased body surveillance, body shame, appearance anxiety, and disordered eating (Watson et al., 2013). Sabik, Cole, and Ward (2010) examined the relationship between female college students' desire to be thin and their body satisfaction from the perspective of race and weight-based contingency of self-worth. Data were

collected from 905 students. The results showed that Caucasian women who based their self-worth on weight reported the most desire to be thin. In regard to African American women, researchers observed a positive relationship between appearance-esteem and desire to be thin for participants who reported their self-worth as being contingent on weight or who subscribed to the beauty ideals of non-African American ethnic groups. Therefore, based on these findings, along with the findings of Trottier et al. (2007), Wasilenko et al. (2007), and Lindner et al. (2008), it is seen that subscription to the “thin ideal” leads to lower body image satisfaction among women regardless of race. This could harken back to the fact that “thinness” (as it is often portrayed by Western culture) is not a biological norm among women, and as long as women strive to reach such an unrealistic goal, they are likely to experience body dissatisfaction.

In 2010, researchers examined the relationship among race, ethnic identity, and body dissatisfaction (Baugh et al., 2010). One hundred eighteen female students at two Southeastern universities (one being a large, traditionally Caucasian institution and the other being a smaller, historically African American institution) were surveyed. The results revealed that Caucasian women had the highest levels of body dissatisfaction. However, the results also revealed that women, regardless of race, who reported thinner body types as ideal reported the highest levels of body dissatisfaction. These findings suggest that mainstream cultural and societal influences may be a better predictor of body dissatisfaction than ethnic identity. It was seen from this study that even though females identified as African American and attended a majority African American university, many of them subscribed to mainstream cultural beauty standards.

Rogers-Wood and Petrie (2010) examined the influence of ethnic identity on disordered eating among African American female college students. These researchers found that African American women who subscribed to African American cultural beauty standards more so than mainstream cultural beauty standards were less likely to suffer from disordered eating than African American women who adhered more to mainstream cultural standards. Hence, a distinctive difference between racial/ethnic identity and cultural identity are observed. In other words, while an individual may identify him/herself as belonging to a specific racial/ethnic group, he/she may not identify with the cultural norms of that race/ethnicity but may instead identify with the cultural norms of another race/ethnicity or the majority racial/ethnic group within society or the environment.

It could be argued that attending an institution where a single, dominant culture exists increases the chances that minorities will be influenced, through peer interactions and social comparisons, by this dominant culture and thereby be at increased risk of experiencing self-discrepancy issues. In fact, studies have shown that minority groups may be at increased risk of body dissatisfaction when extensively exposed to the beauty ideals of the majority group (Aruguete, Nickelberry, & Yates, 2004; Bisaga et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2006; Poran, 2006; Rubin, Fitts, & Becker, 2003; Sussman, Truong, & Lim, 2006). In other words, when exposed extensively to mainstream cultural body image ideals, ideals that differ from the cultural ideals of minority groups, many minority group individuals will oftentimes start to compare themselves to peers representing these mainstream body image ideals and will pursue these ideals themselves. This can lead to self-discrepancy that may only be corrected through the use of cosmetic surgery.



Thereby, it is seen how interactions during college with peers from diverse racial/cultural backgrounds may influence students' body satisfaction and likelihood of undergoing cosmetic surgery.

Findings from body image studies on Hispanic women have been just as inconsistent as the findings on African American women (Pompper & Koenig, 2004). Whereas some findings suggest that Hispanic women express more dissatisfaction with their bodies than their African American and Caucasian counterparts, findings from other studies suggest that Hispanic women's body dissatisfaction is very similar to that of Caucasian women's body dissatisfaction (Pompper & Koenig, 2004). According to Goodman (2005), Hispanic women tend to be more accepting of larger, curvier female figures than Caucasian women. This acceptance of larger, curvier female figures is a cultural beauty preference which is shared in African American culture as well. Despite their acceptance of curvier figures, Hispanic women view thinness as a socially acceptable standard of beauty as well. Because of the existence of this dual and contrasting feminine beauty system in Hispanic culture (much as exists in African American culture), some studies provide evidence to suggest that Hispanic women express more body dissatisfaction and have higher rates of disordered eating than both Caucasian and African American women (Pompper & Koenig, 2004).

Despite the Hispanic population being the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S., the Hispanic community is one of the most underrepresented minority groups in the mainstream media (Pompper & Koenig, 2004). Due to this underrepresentation in the mainstream media, many Hispanic women internalize the thin beauty standards portrayed by the predominantly-Caucasian mainstream media. There is research showing that

Hispanic women who immigrated to the U.S. after age 17 were less likely than Hispanic women who lived in the U.S. before age 17 to internalize mainstream cultural thin ideals (Pompper & Koenig, 2004). Thereby, it is seen that an individual's cultural identity may play a major role in the beauty standards which he/she internalizes as ideal.

Very little research in the field has examined body image in regard to Asian American women (Lee & Vaught, 2003; Sabik et al., 2010). There is research to suggest that Asian American women strongly endorse mainstream, predominantly Caucasian beauty standards, and therefore, may experience substantial pressure to meet thin ideals (Grabe & Hyde, 2006). For instance, in some Asian cultures, excessively thin figures are viewed as ideal for both genders (Jung & Forbes, 2007; Leong, Poh, & Ng, 2004; Pon, Kandiah, & Mohd-Nasir, 2004). Because of these differences in beauty ideals, it is understandable that individuals such as college students may experience psychological discrepancies related to social acceptance when they are placed in a new environment like a college campus where cultural standards differ from those with which they are accustomed. This type of discrepancy or cultural shock can be common on college campuses. As students are exposed to and learn about certain aspects of the new cultures which they encounter during college, self-discrepancies can arise; body dissatisfaction is one of these self-discrepancies (Jung & Lee, 2006; Kennedy et al., 2004).

### Body Image and Cosmetic Surgery

When individuals experience body image dissatisfaction, it is natural that they would seek to improve their physical appearance. Many individuals who are dissatisfied with their weight, shape, and/or size strive to improve their body image through adopting a healthier diet and exercising. However, some individuals turn to less healthy measures

as a means of decreasing their body image dissatisfaction, including excessive exercise, disordered eating, consumption/addiction to diet pills and/or laxatives, and cosmetic surgery. Since 2000, the total number of cosmetic procedures in the U.S. has increased by 111%, with total minimally-invasive cosmetic procedures such as Botox injections increasing by 154% (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2015). In women alone, the total number of cosmetic procedures has increased by 100% since 2000, with the rates of Botox injections, breast augmentations, and abdominoplasties (tummy tuck procedures) increasing by 72%, 35%, and 69%, respectively. For men, the total number of cosmetic procedures has increased by only 22% since 2000. This vast difference between cosmetic procedure rates in men and women in the U.S., despite gender ratios in the U.S. population being nearly equal (51% female and 49% male), provides further indication of the body satisfaction differences between men and women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

As of 2015, Caucasians make up 61.7% of the current U.S. population; African Americans comprise 17.7% of the current population; and Hispanics account for 12.4% of the current national population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Current cosmetic surgery rates as based on race reflect these national population ratios. Today, Caucasians account for 69% of all cosmetic procedure patients, and African Americans and Hispanics account for 8% and 10% of cosmetic procedure patients, respectively (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2015). In 2005, 77% of cosmetic patients were Caucasian; 9% were Hispanic; and 8% were African American (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2005). While Asian Americans accounted for only 3% of cosmetic surgery patients in 2003, this rate increased to 8% by 2014—a statistical increase of significance when considering that cosmetic procedure rates either decreased or remained relatively stagnant among other

racial groups. The significance of the increase in cosmetic surgery procedures among Asian Americans is further seen when considering that Asian Americans make up only 5.3% of the current U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In 2005, the most commonly requested cosmetic procedures for Caucasians, Hispanics, and African Americans were rhinoplasties (nose-resaping), liposuction, breast augmentations, injectable fillers, and Botox injections (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2005). Ten years later, the most commonly requested cosmetic procedures for these racial groups were the same with the addition of abdominoplasties and blepharoplasties (eyelid reconstruction).

According to Furnham and Levitas (2012), individuals who seek cosmetic surgery aim to conform to the beauty ideals most promoted in mainstream Western society. This postulation may not be entirely accurate as it is known that many popular cosmetic procedures today are actually done so that individuals may gain some physical characteristics that are not considered traditional, mainstream, Western-cultural beauty ideals. Because technological advances have made cosmetic procedures safer, less invasive, and lower in cost, many individuals today are more accepting of and willing to undergo cosmetic surgery. Studies have shown that individuals, especially women, with high levels of body dissatisfaction are the most likely to undergo cosmetic surgery (Brown, Furnham, Glanville, & Swami, 2007; Cash, Goldenberg-Bivens, & Grasso, 2005; Swami et al., 2008). In fact, according to data reported by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, women accounted for about 91% of all cosmetic procedures during 2012.

In a British study, 204 participants were asked to complete a questionnaire on their attitudes toward cosmetic surgery, self-esteem, and other related factors (Furnham & Levitas, 2012). Not surprisingly, the results revealed that females with low self-esteem were more likely to undergo cosmetic surgery. A study by Farshidfar, Dastjerdi, and Shahabizadeh (2013) revealed evidence suggesting that an individual's acceptance of cosmetic surgery is influenced by social and psychological factors such as self-esteem and body image satisfaction/dissatisfaction. These researchers also found that women are more likely than men to consider undergoing cosmetic surgery. These findings support similar findings from previous studies (Brown et al., 2007; Frederick, Lever, & Peplau, 2007; Swami et al., 2008).

Despite the surge in cosmetic surgery popularity over the last decade or so, few studies have focused on college students exclusively, especially college men and their attitudes about cosmetic surgery (Delinsky, 2005). Based on young adults, including college students, being so heavily involved in social media photo-sharing, it can be said that college-aged individuals care greatly about their physical appearances and the way that their physical appearances are perceived by others, namely their peers (Duggan, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2015). Whereas researchers have investigated quite extensively many of the most common methods that some college students use to maintain or improve their physical appearances like eating disorders, diet pills, and extreme exercising, the use and acceptance of cosmetic surgery by college students as a means of body image improvement has not been widely studied. College-aged young adults, specifically females, are susceptible to body dissatisfaction, and it is known that some college students turn to unhealthy methods to improve their body satisfaction

(Grabe et al., 2008). Thereby, it would be insightful to understand college students' views on and willingness to undergo cosmetic surgery as a means of increasing their body satisfaction.

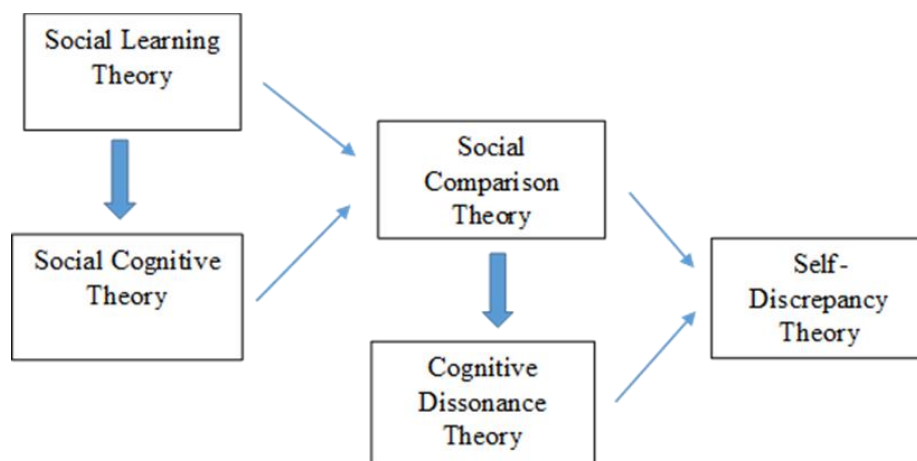
In one study, 302 undergraduate females were surveyed on various cosmetic surgery-related factors (Delinsky, 2005). The results showed that 3% of those surveyed had undergone cosmetic surgery and 50% knew someone (i.e. a friend or family member) who had undergone cosmetic surgery. Furthermore, this study revealed that self-esteem contingent on physical appearance, high levels of exposure to media, and a relationship with individuals who have undergone cosmetic surgery all serve as factors in predicting college students' approval of cosmetic surgery and likelihood of pursuing cosmetic surgery. Surprisingly, race/ethnicity was not determined to be a predicting factor of cosmetic surgery pursuit. Another study on cosmetic surgery assessed the attitudes toward cosmetic surgery of 218 undergraduate females (Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009). Participants in this study were predominantly white. Results revealed that adherence to sociocultural messages from family and friends was a significant predictor of participants' acceptance of and desire for undergoing cosmetic surgery. Yet another study involving 101 undergraduate women attending universities in the northeastern U.S. revealed that desire for cosmetic surgery was predicted by body dissatisfaction, reports of appearance-related teasing, weight, and internalization of mainstream beauty ideals as promoted by the media (Markey & Markey, 2009).

Although most research on societal (and subpopulation such as college students) acceptance of and willingness to undergo cosmetic surgery has largely focused on women, statistics show that cosmetic procedures among men are on the rise (American

Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2015). In recent years, the terms “muscle dysniophia” and “bigorexia” have been coined by researchers to refer to disorders in men whereby men view their musculature as inadequate (Pompper et al., 2007). In order to reduce these feelings of inadequacy regarding muscularity, many men are now turning to plastic surgery to obtain silicone implants in their chests and calves.

### Theoretical Framework

In order to best evaluate the influence of peers on college students’ body image satisfaction, a theoretical framework consisting of theories that have been used substantially in body image and social comparison studies should be constructed and implemented. For this study, Social Comparison Theory (SCompT) will be used to examine students’ propensity for self-comparisons to peers, and Self-Discrepancy Theory (SDT) will be used to examine students’ propensity to use drastic techniques (i.e. cosmetic surgery) in order to increase their body satisfaction. In order to fully understand the principles of these two theories and how these two theories can appropriately guide this research, the origins of these theories will be explored.



*Figure 2. Origin of Theories*

(Festinger, 1954; Higgins, 1987)

### *Social Comparison Theory*

With origins in social learning theory, SCompT was first introduced by Festinger in 1954, and can be closely tied to Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCogT).

According to Festinger (1954), individuals are naturally driven to compare themselves to others who are similar to themselves in some aspect as a means of self-evaluation.

Festinger theorized that individuals tend to compare themselves to others, focusing on the characteristics or attributes that they view as important to gaining popularity, social acceptance, and/or success (Festinger, 1954).

According to SCompT, any group can act as a reference group for comparisons—even those groups that consist of individuals who do not interact directly or verbally (Suls & Wheeler, 2000). According to sociocultural norm theory, a close relative of SCompT, culture and environment define beauty standards and therefore play detrimental roles in individuals' body image views (Paulk et al., 2014). Based on these ideas, it is understandable that social comparisons may lead to body image disturbances and conformity within a population, as those in the minority group may strive to fit in with the majority (Sides-Moore & Tochkov, 2011). Individuals may not look to conform to the appearance norms of the majority group or the appearance standards represented by the majority group within their current environment. Instead, individuals may seek to conform to the beauty ideals upheld by the majority group. In other words, members of the minority group may not aspire to look like members of the majority group as it exists within their own physical environment but may aspire to obtain the ideal beauty standards of the majority group—an aspiration that may also be sought after by the majority group (Paulk et al., 2014).



### *Self-Discrepancy Theory*

Higgins' (1987) Self-Discrepancy Theory (SDT) has origins in cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) and SCompT, which were both established by Festinger during the 1950s. Self-Discrepancy Theory describes individuals as possessing three different selves: actual-self, ideal-self, and ought-self. The actual-self refers to the attributes which an individual actually possesses. The ideal-self refers to attributes which an individual would like to possess, and the ought-self refers to attributes that an individual believes he/she should possess according to societal or cultural standards. The ideal-self and the ought-self are known as self-guides, and individuals frequently strive to reach the standards of these two self-guides. These self-guides are determined by external factors, including societal, environmental, and cultural standards. Therefore, it could be said that comparison of the actual-self to the ideal- or ought-selves is equivalent to comparing the actual-self to environmental or cultural standards, and societal body image standards, respectively.

According to Higgins, individuals tend to compare their actual-self to their ideal-self, and the discrepancy created by the comparison of these two selves can lead to body dissatisfaction, especially when the self-evaluative standards or attributes being compared are physical in nature (Heron & Smyth, 2013). Oftentimes, the task of narrowing the gap between one's actual-self and one's ideal-self is extremely difficult, if not impossible entirely, especially when it comes to physical appearance. Individuals can also experience a self-discrepancy when comparing their actual-self to their ought-self (Higgins, 1987). Higgins proposed that discrepancies arising from actual-self to ideal-self comparisons result in depression, whereas discrepancies arising from actual-self to

ought-self comparisons result in anxiety. Therefore, SDT is an optimal theory for studying body image satisfaction and the psychological issues associated with body image, as SDT seeks to explain the relationship between one's conflicting beliefs and the psychological issues that manifest within one as a result of these conflicting beliefs (Heron & Smyth, 2013).

### *Social Learning Theory*

The origins of social learning theory (SLT) date back to the late 1800s, when the theory arose from the behaviorism cluster of psychological theories aimed at explaining human behaviors (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b). According to SLT, individuals learn social behaviors by observing the behaviors of others. Since its beginnings, SLT has undergone much development and reform. It was in the 1930s that cognitions (unobservable psychological variables or elements of knowledge) were introduced into the theory as major influencers of human behavior in addition to the environment. In 1941, SLT became solidified as a behaviorism theory when Miller and Dollard published their book *Social Learning and Imitation*, which explained how the environment reinforces the behaviors of individuals. According to Miller and Dollard, the way that an individual behaves and responds to his/her environment can influence the way that other individuals in the environment behave. There are three basic tenets of SLT: 1) Consequences (i.e. rewards or punishments) influence the chances of individuals repeating certain behaviors in certain situations; 2) Individuals can learn through participation and by observing others, which is known as vicarious learning; and 3) Individuals are more prone to replicating the observed behaviors of individuals with whom they identify or find some

commonality or similarity. Today, there are many versions of SLT, and the theory has also spawned several new theories as well (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b).

### *Social Cognitive Theory*

Social cognitive theory (SCogT) is one of the many new theories that have emerged from SLT (Bandura, 1986). By examining the tenets of SLT as well as Miller and Dollard's publication, the origins of SCogT are seen. Over the years, many theorists have offered revisions to and expanded upon SLT. The most commonly researched of these revisions is that of Bandura. Although Bandura's work on SLT dates back to the 1960s, he did not officially give his version of the theory the moniker of SCogT until 1986. Social cognitive theory has frequently been used in studies concerned with understanding the behavior of individuals and groups and identifying methods to modify behaviors; the theory has also been used in health promotion interventions (Heron & Smyth, 2013).

Bandura's SCogT focuses largely on cognitive concepts, specifically the ways that individuals cognitively process social experiences and how these cognitive processes influence individuals' behaviors and development (Bandura, 1986). According to SCogT, an individual's behaviors are determined by a dynamic interaction of three main sources of influence: personal factors (i.e. age, gender, race, etc.), behavior observed in surroundings, and the environment. Social cognitive theory postulates that some of these sources may be more influential than others based on differences in individuals and situations. Furthermore, interactions between sources of influence will not always occur simultaneously or in unilateral measures. An individual can be intellectually and emotionally influenced by the interactions between him/herself and the observed

behaviors of others. Likewise, an individual's beliefs and expectations may be influenced by social experiences that promote modeling and social persuasion and that result from the interactions between the individual and his/her environment. Interactions can also occur between an individual's environment and the behaviors observed by the individual. In other words, an individual's environment plays a role in determining not only his/her behaviors but the behaviors that he/she observes in his/her surroundings. Furthermore, the theory recognizes that an individual's interactions with his/her environment will be partially shaped by the individual's age, gender, race, and other physical traits (Bandura, 1986).

### *Cognitive Dissonance Theory*

Cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) was first proposed by Festinger in 1957, in an attempt to explain the outcome of social comparisons. Since its development, CDT has been used as a part of the theoretical framework in hundreds of studies that have uncovered much information regarding attitudes and beliefs and the internalization of values (Mills & Harmon-Jones, 1999). According to Festinger, individuals are motivated to change when they experience dissonance between two cognitions (i.e. attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, or other psychological elements) (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance theory defines cognitions as unobservable psychological variables or elements of knowledge which coexist in pairs that may be either relevant or irrelevant to each other (Mills & Harmon-Jones, 1999). If two cognitions are relevant to each other, they are said to be either consonant or dissonant. Consonant cognitions are positively correlated, whereas dissonant cognitions are negatively correlated. Cognitions can exist about

behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, or feelings. Furthermore, cognitions can exist in regard to one's self, another person or group, or aspects of the environment.

There are four common paradigms used in cognitive dissonance research: the effort-justification (E-J) paradigm, the belief-disconfirmation (B-D) paradigm, the induced compliance (I-C) paradigm, and the impression-management (I-M) theory (Mills & Harmon-Jones, 1999). According to the E-J paradigm, an individual experiences discord in some aspect when he/she engages in an unpleasant activity in order to achieve some desirable outcome. The B-D paradigm, which may be the most referenced cognitive dissonance paradigm, states that feelings of dissonance arise when individuals are introduced to information that is inconsistent with their pre-existing beliefs. Combining both the E-J and B-D paradigms, the I-C paradigm states that individuals experience dissonance when they engage in behavior that contradicts a previously held belief or attitude. The I-M theory, or paradigm, states that individuals may experience dissonance when he/she forcibly changes his/her attitudes in an attempt to manage how others view him/her (Mills & Harmon-Jones, 1999).

### Summary

College campuses are environments that may foster body image concerns due to increased occurrences of peer influence and appearance-related social comparisons (Lindner et al., 2008). College students are constantly surrounded by peers of their own age group—increasing the chances for appearance-related social comparisons to be made as students interact with each other either indirectly or directly. In addition to serving as an environment whereby young adults may interact extensively with others in their own age group, college provides students with an environment whereby they may interact

with and form relationships with peers of diverse races/ethnicities and/or cultures, oftentimes for the first time in their lives (Bowman & Denson, 2012). With peer interactions, there comes peer influence, which often comes in the form of self-comparisons to peers.

Research suggests that peer influence is correlated with body dissatisfaction in young women (Shomaker & Furman, 2007). However, the culmination of how race or culture impacts peer interactions and peer influence is not well understood. Likewise, it is not well understood how race or culture influences body image satisfaction. Whereas some research seems to suggest certain relationships between race or culture and body image satisfaction, other research contradicts such conclusions.

When college students look to peers as guiding figures and seek acceptance and validation from them as well, they often compare themselves to their peers. If students make these comparisons and come to the realization that their actual selves do not match that of the peers to whom they look for guidance, acceptance, and validation, students will seek to correct the self-discrepancy. When individuals experience such self-discrepancies regarding body image, it is natural that they would seek to improve their physical appearance. One way that individuals seek to improve their body image satisfaction is through cosmetic surgery. Since 2000, the total number of cosmetic procedures in the U.S. has increased by 111% (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2015). Despite the surge in cosmetic surgery popularity over the last decade or so, few studies have focused on college students exclusively, especially college men and their attitudes about cosmetic surgery (Delinsky, 2005).

Because college-aged adults are so heavily involved in social media photo-sharing, it can be said that college students care greatly about their physical appearances and the way that their physical appearances are perceived by their peers (Duggan, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2015). Whereas researchers have investigated quite extensively many of the most common methods that some college students use to maintain or improve their physical appearances like eating disorders, diet pills, and extreme exercising, the use and acceptance of cosmetic surgery by college students as a means of body image improvement has not been widely studied.

## CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to: 1) investigate the extent to which diverse peer interactions occur at institutions of various student population racial compositions, 2) investigate if and how diverse peer interactions influence college students' level of body image satisfaction; and 3) assess college students' views on cosmetic surgery, specifically their acceptance of and likelihood of undergoing cosmetic procedures in order to increase their body satisfaction. Previous research has shown that body image-related issues affect many college students, particularly college females.

### Design

This comparative study was conducted using a quantitative design whereby college students were recruited through their respective institutions and surveyed using an online questionnaire. The goal of this study was to determine the relationship among college students' level of body image satisfaction, their interactions with peers of different races, and their views on cosmetic surgery. There were three main parts to this study. In the first part of the study, diverse peer interaction activity (i.e. dependent variable) was studied in terms of race, gender, and institutional type (i.e. independent variables). In the second part of the study, body image satisfaction (i.e. dependent variable) was studied in terms of race, gender, institutional type, and diverse peer interactions (i.e. independent variables). In the third part of the study, acceptance of cosmetic surgery as a means of body image improvement (i.e. dependent variable) was studied in terms of race, gender, institutional type, diverse peer interactions, and body image satisfaction (i.e. independent variables).



In order to make a generalization regarding the differences in college students' body satisfaction and views on cosmetic surgery based on the interplay of race, gender, and peer interactions, it was necessary to collect a substantial amount of data from a large population. Therefore, a quantitative research design method was used. In addition, the use of data collected from a large population allowed the researcher to more effectively make in-group and between-group comparisons. Study participants were selected using a combination of random and convenience sampling techniques. Data obtained in this study was analyzed using ANOVA, independent samples t-test, and correlation in order to determine the relationships among body image satisfaction, diverse peer interactions, and views on cosmetic surgery. By determining the relationships among these factors, higher education institutions could potentially develop and implement policies that better address many of the psychological issues that affect college students but often go unaddressed.

#### Target Population

Prior research suggests that college students' body image satisfaction can differ according to geographical region (Moradi & Moradi, 2010; Paulk et al., 2014). Therefore, the researcher deemed it necessary to investigate the country's different regions separately, and solely focused on students in the Southeast for this study. Study participants consisted of college students attending nine higher education institutions in the Southeast. All of these institutions were four-year, public, non-religious affiliated universities. Two of the institutions were equally-diverse institutions, meaning that no single racial/ethnic group comprised more than 45% of the student population, with Caucasians and African Americans being the two most populous racial groups. Five

institutions were majority-driven institutions (i.e. two PWIs, one HBCU, and two PHIs), with a single racial group comprising at least 75% of the student population. One institution was an equally-diverse institution with Caucasians and Hispanics being the two most populous racial/ethnic groups. The last institution served as a control group and represented most typical institutions in the Southeast, with Caucasian students being the most populous group but not overwhelmingly so (i.e. student population consisting of about 60% Caucasian students, 30% African American students, and 10% other race students).

The southeast region of the United States, which is commonly referred to as “The South,” was chosen as the focal geographic location of this study due to its racial/ethnic diversity and resulting cultural uniqueness. The Southeast has a rich and tumultuous history characterized by racially/ethnically-based cultural discord as multiple cultural groups have strived to co-exist within the region for centuries (Wilson, Holt, & Green, 2013). Many books have been written on Southern culture, and in 2013, an entire encyclopedia on the region’s present-day culture and its origins was published (Wilson et al., 2013). The encyclopedia explores several different themes that shape Southern culture including language, religion, food, history, architecture, and race, among other aspects of culture.

Today, the Southeast remains a melting pot of different racial/ethnic and cultural groups. According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, 55% of Americans who identified as African American lived in the southeastern region of the country. According to the Pew Research Center (2015), two (i.e. Florida and Texas) of the three states with the largest Hispanic populations are located within the Southeast. Due to the region’s history of

racial/ethnic and cultural tension and efforts over the last half century to overcome racial discord, the region's overall culture is one that is comprised of a vast array of both historical and present-day, racially-based cultures that have become integrated and representative of the region.

All students who were at least 18 years old and enrolled at one of the nine institutions included in this study were eligible to participate. However, data collected from students who identified sexually as non-heterosexual were not included in the data analysis process of the study. Research suggests that non-heterosexual individuals represent separate subcultural groups that possess their own customs and ideals, including beauty and body image ideals (Bastug, 2011; Carper, Negy, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010; Daniel, Bridges, & Levant, 2013; DiBartolo & Shaffer, 2002; DiPasquale & Petrie, 2013; Gil, 2007; La Rocque & Cioe, 2011; Markey & Markey, 2014; Reinking & Alexander, 2005). Because this study focused on gender and race but not sexuality as subcultures, it was speculated that the inclusion of data pertaining to other subcultural body image ideals might introduce significant error into the findings of the study. Data collected from non-heterosexual participants may be used by the researcher at a later date in other studies that focus on the body image satisfaction of individuals in these other subcultural groups. Only undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 24 were eligible to participate in the study. Because graduate students and non-traditional undergraduate students represent a vastly diverse group(s), the researcher chose to exclude these individuals from the study in order to focus on traditional-aged undergraduate students. Research has shown that traditional-aged college students are one of the most at risk groups to be affected by body image and peer influence issues (Baugh et al., 2010).

## Procedure

Study participants were recruited using a combination of random and convenience sampling. Of the nine institutions surveyed in this study, only four required Institutional Review Board approval. Upon obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, the researcher contacted via email 10 – 15 instructors at each institution, requesting that he/she forward information about the study as well as the link to the online questionnaire to his/her then currently enrolled students for the Spring 2016 semester. Instructors at each institution were chosen at random from campus directories of faculty found at each institution's website. Institutions chosen to participate in the study were selected based on racial/ethnic student population numbers as reported to the National Center of Educational Statistics for the 2012-2013 academic year.

Participants who took the online questionnaire had the option of entering a drawing to win one of four 12-month magazine subscriptions. In order to enter the drawing, participants were asked to provide an active email address. Entering the drawing was not mandatory, however, and providing an active email address was only mandatory if participants wished to be entered into the drawing. Furthermore, eligibility for entering the drawing was not contingent on participants completing the survey or providing answers to all questions. The drawing was held after the survey had closed and all submitted data had been retrieved by the researcher. Winners of the four magazine subscriptions were randomly selected based on the number assigned to them when they submitted their surveys and provided an active email address. Winners were notified via the email address which they provided upon completion of the survey, and prizes were distributed electronically via email.

## Instrument

The survey instrument used in this study consisted of five different scales: the Body Image Quality of Life Inventory (BIQLI) scale; the Body Image Ideals Questionnaire (BIQ); the Appearance Schemas Inventory-Revised (ASI-R) scale; the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale (ACSS); and the Racial Perceptions Survey (RPS). Because the survey scales used in this study were copyright protected, the researcher was unable to include these scales within this document. However, the researcher did obtain approval to use these survey scales for the purposes of this research, and the scales may be obtained through their individual developers.

Survey content included body image satisfaction/dissatisfaction, peer/friend group characteristics, overall body image views and opinions, and cosmetic surgery views and opinions. The survey instrument also contained questions regarding participants' demographic information such as age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual identity, classification, and living situation. The survey instrument consisted of 103 closed-ended, Likert-scale items including demographic items and was administered in electronic format using the Qualtrics online software program. The actual, total number of survey items answered by each participant varied based on participants' responses to each question. (For example, answering some questions "no" may have made certain subsequent questions non-applicable to a participant.) Prior to starting the questionnaire, participants were presented with an electronic informed consent statement, notifying them that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they had the option to discontinue participation at any point without prejudice or penalty. Once participants

had read the statement, they were asked to check a box to signify that they had read the informed consent, understood it, and agreed to the terms of the study.

#### *Body Image Quality of Life Inventory Scale*

The Body Image Quality of Life Inventory Scale (BIQLI) is a 19-item scale that measures the way that body image affects the lives of individuals in terms of self-esteem, mood, social relations, sexual functions, eating behaviors, etc. (Cash, Jakatdar, & Williams, 2004; Jakatdar, Cash, & Engle, 2006). In other words, the BIQLI measures the impact of body image on quality of life (Giovannelli, Cash, Henson, & Engle, 2008). The scale uses a 7-point Likert-type response scale that ranges from -3 to +3, with higher scores indicating body image having a more positive impact on quality of life (Jakatdar et al., 2006). The BIQLI has been used in several studies, and has been found to be a reliable and valid survey instrument when studying both male and female populations of adults aged 18 and over (Cash, 2004; Cash & Fleming, 2002; Cash & Grasso, 2005; Cash et al., 2004; Jakatdar et al., 2006). In several different studies, the internal consistency has been determined to be 0.96, and the 2-week test-retest reliability has been determined to be 0.82. Information collected using this scale could shed light on the extent that body image issues impact the lives of college students, and could potentially help institutions assess how to better address these issues.

#### *Body Image Ideals Questionnaire*

The Body Image Ideals Questionnaire (BIQ) is a survey instrument that measures individuals' body image ideals as well as individuals' self-perceived deviance from these ideals (Cash, 2004; Giovannelli et al., 2008). The 22-item scale assesses these ideals and deviances in regard to overall appearance as well as 10 specific physical characteristics

including height, weight, skin complexion, hair texture/thickness, facial features, muscle tone, body proportions, chest/breast size, physical strength, and physical coordination. Scores on the BIQ range from -3 to +9, with higher scores indicating greater self-ideal discrepancies. The BIQ has been used in several body image studies, and has been found to produce valid results (Cash, 2000; Cash & Szymanski, 1995). The internal consistency of the scale ranges from 0.7 to 0.9 for each subscale of the questionnaire. Because the BIQ assesses body image self-discrepancies which often lead individuals to engage in less healthy methods of body image improvement including disordered eating and cosmetic surgery, information gleaned from using this survey instrument is key to this study.

#### *Appearance Schemas Inventory-Revised Scale*

Originally developed by Cash and Labarge (1996), the Appearance Schemas Inventory-Revised Scale is an extensively revised and empirically validated survey instrument for assessing individuals' psychological investment in their physical appearance (Cash, 2004). The ASI-R is composed of two subscales and 20 items: the Self-Evaluative Salience (SES) subscale and the Motivational Salience (MS) subscale. The SES subscale consists of 12 items and measures how important an individual's physical appearance is to his/her sense of self-worth. The MS subscale has 8 items and assesses the extent to which individuals engage in appearance-management behaviors. Internal consistency for the survey instrument has been determined to be approximately 0.8 (Giovannelli et al., 2008). The 2-week test-retest reliability for the ASI-R has been found to range between 0.78 and 0.88 (Cash & Grasso, 2005). The use of the ASI-R in this study enables the researcher to collect information regarding students' views on the

importance of physical appearance to one's life as well as the lengths that students will go to achieve and/or maintain a certain physical appearance.

#### *Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale*

The Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale (ACSS) is a 15-item survey instrument that has been shown by numerous studies to be reliable and valid in measuring adults' acceptance of cosmetic surgery in accordance with body image satisfaction (Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005; Swami et al., 2008). The scale assesses individuals' views on both social and personal acceptance of undergoing cosmetic surgery as a way to improve one's body satisfaction. Thereby, the use of this scale will be beneficial to addressing the third part of this study, which deals with cosmetic surgery acceptance.

#### *Racial Perceptions Survey*

The Intergroup Interactions Scale (IIS) is a 35-item survey instrument that measures college students' perceptions of other racial groups, opportunity for engagement in diverse peer interactions, frequency of engagement, and quality of engagement (Leonard, 2013). The scale was pilot tested using both male and female college students of various races/ethnicities and academic classifications, and was administered using Qualtrics online software. Based on the results of the pilot test, the internal consistency for the scale was determined to be 0.75. For this study, the use of the IIS will be important in assessing students' engagement in diverse peer interactions.

#### **Constructs**

Using the five survey instrument scales, four constructs were tested: Diverse Peer Interactions, Body Image Satisfaction, Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance, and Social



Comparisons. The Diverse Peer Interactions construct encompasses five sub-constructs: effort to engage in diverse peer interactions, diverse peer interactions prior to college, diverse peer interactions during college, frequency of diverse peer interactions during college, and homophily vs. propinquity. All five Diverse Peer Interactions sub-constructs were tested using the Intergroup Interactions Scale. Effort to engage in diverse peer interactions was measured using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options being strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Frequency of diverse peer interactions during college was measured using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options being never, once or twice a year, once or twice a semester, every week, and daily. The other three Diverse Peer Interaction sub-constructs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options being all my race, almost all my race, about half my race, almost all other race(s), and all other race(s).

The Body Image Satisfaction construct also encompasses five sub-constructs: body image as a priority, body image satisfaction: actual self vs. ideal self, body image satisfaction: importance, body image effect on social interactions, and body image effect on life in general. Body image as a priority was tested using questions from the ASI-R SES subscale. The sub-constructs body image satisfaction: actual self vs. ideal self and body image satisfaction: importance were tested using the BIQ scale. The sub-constructs body image effect on social interactions and body image effect on life in general were tested using the BIQLI scale. Body image as a priority was measured using a 5-point Likert scale with the answer options being strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The sub-constructs dealing with body image effect were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options being very negative

effect, negative effect, no effect, positive effect, and very positive effect. Body image satisfaction: actual self vs. ideal self and body image satisfaction: importance were measured using a 3-point Likert scale with the answer options being not important, somewhat important, and very important.

The Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance construct encompasses two sub-constructs: willingness to seek cosmetic surgery for self and overall acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Both sub-constructs were tested using the ACSS, and both sub-constructs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options being strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The Social Comparisons construct was tested using the ASI-R scale, and measured using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options being strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly disagree.

### Analysis

All data were retrieved from Qualtrics by the researcher and uploaded to SPSS for analysis. All data obtained were analyzed using SPSS software. This statistical processing software program was used to sort and compare data based on groups, and to make ANOVA, correlation, and other calculations needed to compare group data. Group comparisons were made based on race, gender, academic classification, diversity of peer interactions, institutional type (e.g. MDI and EDI), and living situation (e.g. on-campus and off-campus). These comparisons and analyses enabled the researcher to determine the relationships among body image satisfaction, peer interactions, and cosmetic surgery views.

## Ethical Considerations

Before any potential participants were recruited or contacted, the researcher was granted approval from all institutions participating in this study to conduct this research. Prior to completing the study questionnaire, all participants were presented with an informed consent statement in electronic format. The informed consent described the study and its purpose to participants, and explained to them that participation was completely voluntary and that they had the option to discontinue participation at any point without any penalty or prejudice. After reading the informed consent, participants were asked to check a box to signify that they had read the informed consent, understood it, and agreed to participate in the study. For those participants who wished to be entered into the magazine drawing, they were asked to submit a valid email address. However, submission of this email address was completely voluntary, and all submitted email addresses will remain confidential. For those participants who did wish to be entered into the drawing and submitted an email address, their email addresses were not matched to their survey responses in any way. All survey data will remain anonymous, and be stored in a secure password protected electronic format.

## Summary

In order to reach the investigative goals of this study, a quantitative research design was implemented. Undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 24 were recruited via email from nine public, non-religious affiliated higher education institutions located in the southeast region of the United States. The nine surveyed institutions were chosen based on student population racial ratios as determined by enrollment data reported to the NCES for the 2012-2013 academic year. Participants in the study

completed an online questionnaire that assessed students' peer interaction characteristics, level of body image satisfaction, views on cosmetic surgery, and social comparison tendencies. Data was analyzed using a series of ANOVA, t-tests, and correlational analyses. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, and all data were kept anonymous and protected.

## CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

### Description of Sample Demographics

Survey data were collected from 169 participants. In order to participate in the study, participants had to meet two qualifications: 1) be currently enrolled as an undergraduate student and 2) be between the ages of 18 and 24. Participants who identified as non-heterosexual were allowed to participate in the study but data collected from these participants were not included in the analysis process due to reasons discussed in the Methodology section. Data from 10 participants were excluded from the analysis process due to: 1) failure to disclose and/or meet the study's inclusion criteria concerning age, undergraduate academic status, and sexual identity or 2) failure to complete at least 50% of the questionnaire. After eliminating participants based on these qualifications, the study included data from a total of 159 participants. Male participants comprised 47.1% of participants, and females comprised 52.9% of participants. The majority of participants identified as Caucasian (45.3%), with African Americans making up the second largest group of participants (30.2%) (Table 2). No participants identified as being Native American or Alaskan Native. Two participants (1.3%) identified as being of a race/ethnicity "other" than those listed but did not specify the way in which they identified in terms of race/ethnicity. In terms of academic classification, participation rates were evenly distributed among academic levels (e.g. freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors) (Table 3). Likewise, there was an even distribution of participants who reported living off-campus (47.1%) and participants who reported living on-campus (52.9%).

It was seen that 20.8% of participants reported attending a majority-driven institution where Caucasians were the overwhelming majority group; 23.3% of

participants attended a majority-driven institution where African Americans were the most populous racial/ethnic group; and 14.5% of participants attended a majority-driven institution where the largest racial/ethnic group consisted of Hispanic students (Table 1). Three institutions included in the study were categorized as equally-diverse, and 30.2% of study participants attended these institutions. One institution included in the study served as a control group. The racial makeup of the control group institution was reflective of most typical, four-year, public institutions in the region, with Caucasian students comprising roughly 60% of the student population and African American students comprising roughly 30%. Only 11.3% of participants in this study attended the control group institution.

Table 1

*Sample Demographics by Institution Category*

	n
Equally-Diverse Institutions	48 (30.2%)
Majority-Driven (Predominantly Caucasian) Institutions	33 (20.8%)
Majority-Driven (Predominantly African American) Institutions	37 (23.3%)
Majority-Driven (Predominantly Hispanic) Institutions	23 (14.5%)
Control Group Institution	18 (11.3%)

Table 2

*Sample Demographics by Race*

	n
Caucasian	72 (45.3%)
African American	48 (30.2%)
Hispanic	19 (12.1%)
Asian American	16 (10.2%)
Native American/Alaskan Native	0 (0.0%)
Other	2 (1.3%)

Table 3

*Sample Demographics by Academic Classification*

	n
Freshmen	39 (24.8%)
Sophomores	38 (24.2%)
Juniors	36 (22.9%)
Seniors	44 (28.0%)

This study examined the relationship among four constructs: Diverse Peer Interactions, Body Image Satisfaction, Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance, and Social Comparisons.

Diverse Peer Interactions

The Diverse Peer Interactions construct was divided into five sub-constructs: effort to engage in diverse peer interactions, diverse peer interactions prior to college, diverse peer interactions during college, homophily vs. propinquity, and frequency of diverse peer interactions during college.

### *Effort to Engage in Diverse Peer Interactions*

The effort to engage in diverse peer interactions sub-construct consisted of four survey items involving participants' comfortability engaging with peers from different racial groups than their own, likelihood of seeking out opportunities to meet and learn about peers from different racial groups, and views on the importance of interacting with and forming relationships with peers from different racial groups. Cronbach's alpha for this sub-scale was 0.948. This sub-construct was the only Diverse Peer Interactions sub-construct to have any correlation to participants' reported demographic or institutional information, and was found to have a very weak, positive correlation to gender and a very weak, negative correlation to academic classification. Despite these correlational relationships, no significant differences between participants' effort to engage in diverse peer interactions and demographic or institutional factors were observed, with one exception. Freshmen ( $M = 3.23$ ;  $SD = 1.245$ ) reported being more comfortable interacting with peers of different races/ethnicities than juniors ( $M = 2.44$ ;  $SD = 1.054$ ) were,  $F(3, 152) = 2.861$ ,  $p = 0.039$ .

### *Diverse Peer Interactions Prior to College*

This sub-construct consisted of three survey items and concerned participants' diverse peer group interactions during high school and in the neighborhoods in which they grew up. Cronbach's alpha for this sub-scale was 0.932. Diverse peer interactions prior to college were found to have a strong, positive correlation to diverse peer interactions during college as well as to the homophily vs. propinquity sub-construct (Table 4). However, the diverse peer interactions prior to college sub-construct was not found to be correlated to any other Diverse Peer Interaction sub-constructs, and there



were no significant differences in the participants' peer interactions prior to college based on any demographic or institutional factors.

#### *Diverse Peer Interactions during College*

This sub-construct consisted of two survey items and specifically asked participants about the racial makeup of their friendship groups and peer interactions during their college tenure. Cronbach's alpha for this sub-scale was 0.928. Diverse peer interactions during college were found to have a strong, positive correlation to the homophily vs. propinquity sub-construct. However, this sub-construct was not found to be correlated to any other Diverse Peer Interaction sub-constructs, and there were no significant differences in the participants' peer interactions during college based on any demographic or institutional factors.

#### *Homophily vs. Propinquity*

The homophily vs. propinquity sub-construct consisted of two survey items that focused on the racial makeup of college organizations and social activities in which participants were engaged. The homophily vs. propinquity sub-scale was set up as a continuum, with lower scores equating to racially homogenous, homophily-characteristic interactions and higher scores equating to racially mixed, propinquity-characteristic interactions. Cronbach's alpha for this sub-scale was 0.918. In regard to the homophily vs. propinquity sub-construct, African American participants attending EDI ( $M = 2.119$ ;  $SD = 1.264$ ) were found to engage in less diverse college organizations and social activities than African American students attending any other institutional type, with the exception of HBCU (Table 5). As expected, African American students attending PWI were shown to participate in the most racially diverse college organizations and social

activities, more so than any other racial/ethnic group attending the same institutional type,  $F(4,153) = 3.036$ ,  $p = 0.020$ . Surprisingly, African American students attending EDI ( $M = 2.119$ ;  $SD = 1.264$ ) did not report participating in racially diverse social activities and college organizations any more so than African Americans attending PWI ( $M = 3.636$ ;  $SD = 1.790$ ). Caucasian students reported participating in the least racially diverse activities when attending EDI where Hispanics and Caucasians were equally populous groups ( $M = 1.889$ ;  $SD = 0.894$ ), and Caucasian students reported participating in the most racially diverse activities when attending HBCU ( $M = 3.688$ ;  $SD = 1.668$ ) and the control group institution ( $M = 3.438$ ;  $SD = 1.545$ ). Hispanic and Asian American students' participation in social activities and college organizations was relatively the same across institutions (Table 5).

#### *Frequency of Diverse Peer Interactions during College*

This sub-construct measured participants' frequency of engaging in diverse peer interactions, specifically participants' engagement in serious conversations with peers from different racial groups. This sub-construct consisted of three survey items, and Cronbach's alpha for this sub-scale was 0.913. Participants attending EDI ( $M = 3.667$ ;  $SD = 1.452$ ) reported engaging in diverse peer interactions more frequently than participants attending HBCU ( $M = 2.419$ ;  $SD = 1.382$ ),  $F(5, 149) = 2.585$ ,  $p = 0.028$ . In fact, for all institutional types in general, Asian American participants ( $M = 3.609$ ;  $SD = 1.650$ ) were shown to report the highest frequency of diverse peer interactions, with African American participants ( $M = 2.543$ ;  $SD = 1.481$ ) reporting the lowest frequency of diverse peer interactions,  $F(4, 149) = 3.817$ ,  $p = 0.008$ .

Results showed that participants attending EDI ( $M = 4.17$ ;  $SD = 1.465$ ) were more likely than participants attending HBCU ( $M = 2.35$ ;  $SD = 1.418$ ) to engage in serious conversations with peers of other races,  $F(8, 148) = 2.718$ ,  $p = 0.008$ . Similarly, participants who identified as either Asian American ( $M = 3.88$ ;  $SD = 1.928$ ) or Caucasian ( $M = 3.41$ ;  $SD = 1.536$ ) were found to be more likely than participants who identified as African American ( $M = 2.55$ ;  $SD = 1.599$ ) to engage in serious conversations with peers of different races,  $F(4, 150) = 4.065$ ,  $p = 0.004$ . Results also showed that female participants ( $M = 3.53$ ;  $SD = 1.845$ ) were more likely than male participants ( $M = 2.85$ ;  $SD = 1.501$ ) to engage in serious conversations with peers of other races,  $t(153) = -2.508$ ,  $p = 0.002$ . Moreover, participants who resided in on-campus housing ( $M = 2.878$ ;  $SD = 1.012$ ) reported being more likely to engage in diverse peer interactions than were participants who resided in off-campus housing ( $M = 2.682$ ;  $SD = 1.327$ ),  $t(148) = 1.024$ ,  $p = 0.001$ .

Table 4

*Diverse Peer Interactions: Correlations*

	Diverse Peer Interactions: Prior to College	Homophily vs. Proximity	Frequency of Diverse Peer Interactions: During College	Diverse Peer Interactions During College
Effort to Engage in Diverse Peer Interactions	$r = .345$ $n = 152$ $p < .001$	$r = .396$ $n = 150$ $p < .001$	$r = .393$ $n = 150$ $p < .001$	$r = .358$ $n = 153$ $p < .001$
Diverse Peer Interactions: Prior to College		$r = .825$ $n = 153$ $p < .001$	$r = .335$ $n = 153$ $p < .001$	$r = .859$ $n = 156$ $p < .001$

Table 4 (continued).

Frequency of Diverse Peer Interactions: During College	$r = .315$ $n = 151$ $p < .001$
Diverse Peer Interactions During College	$r = .817$ $n = 154$ $p < .001$

Table 5

*Diverse Peer Interactions: Homophily vs. Propinquity*

	African American	Asian American	Caucasian	Hispanic
EDI	2.119 (1.264)	3.400 (1.782)	2.833 (1.088)	3.714 (1.680)
EDI-H	3.000 ( - )	3.000 ( - )	1.889 (0.894)	5.000 ( - )
MDI: PWI	3.636 (1.790)	3.625 (1.109)	3.042 (0.988)	3.100 (1.746)
MDI: PHI	2.000 (1.095)	3.000 (1.732)	2.773 (1.081)	2.333 (1.528)
MDI: HBCU	1.500 (0.707)	2.750 (2.475)	3.688 (1.668)	1.000 (0.000)
Control	2.833 (1.366)	1.000 ( - )	3.438 (1.545)	1.000 ( - )

## Body Image Satisfaction

The Body Image Satisfaction construct was divided into five sub-constructs: body image as a priority, body image effect on social interactions, body image effect on life in general, body image satisfaction: actual self vs. ideal self, and body image satisfaction: importance. For this construct, there were no significant differences in participants' overall or sub-construct scores for any of the demographic or institutional factors. However, there were significant relationships among several of the subscales.

### *Body Image as a Priority*

This sub-construct consisted of 12 survey items that focused on participants' daily priority with their physical appearance—in other words, the extent to which participants focused on their physical appearance on a daily basis. Cronbach's alpha for this sub-scale was 0.976. A moderate, positive correlation was found between body image as a priority and body image effect on social interactions (Table 6). A moderate, positive correlation was also found between body image as a priority and body image effect on life in general. On average, participants scored slightly less than neutral on the body image as a priority sub-construct ( $M = 2.87$ ;  $SD = 1.0544$ ). However, there were no significant differences based on demographic or institutional factors in participants' responses to items on this sub-scale.

### *Body Image Effect on Social Interactions*

This sub-construct measured the way that participants' feelings about their body image affect their social interactions. This sub-scale consisted of five survey items, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.959. Body image effect on social interactions was found to have a strong, positive correlation to body image effect on life in general ( $r = 0.918$ ,  $n = 150$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). On average, participants reported that their feelings regarding their body image had a slightly negative effect on their social interactions ( $M = 2.477$ ;  $SD = 1.113$ ). However, there were no significant differences based on demographic or institutional factors in participants' responses to items on this sub-scale.

### *Body Image Effect on Life in General*

This sub-construct measured the way that participants' feelings about their body image affect their life in general. This sub-scale consisted of four survey items, and

Cronbach's alpha was 0.959. On average, participants reported that their feelings regarding their body image had a slightly negative effect on their life in general ( $M = 2.513$ ;  $SD = 1.098$ ). However, there were no significant differences based on demographic or institutional factors in participants' responses to items on this sub-scale.

*Body Image Satisfaction: Actual Self vs. Ideal Self*

This sub-construct consisted of eight survey items and measured the extent to which participants' ideal self-body image matched their actual self-body image.

Cronbach's alpha for this sub-scale was 0.969. For the body image satisfaction: actual self vs. ideal self sub-construct, participants reported feeling as though their actual self-body image was somewhere between almost matching their ideal self-body image and exactly matching their ideal self-body image ( $M = 2.622$ ;  $SD = 1.245$ ). However, there were no significant differences based on demographic or institutional factors in participants' responses to items on this sub-scale.

*Body Image Satisfaction: Importance*

This sub-construct consisted of eight survey items and measured how important it was for participants to have their ideal self-body image match their actual self-body image. Cronbach's alpha for this sub-scale was 0.968. For the body image satisfaction: importance sub-construct, participants reported that having their actual self-body image match their ideal self-body image was somewhat important ( $M = 2.497$ ;  $SD = 1.778$ ) to them but not of the utmost importance. However, there were no significant differences based on demographic or institutional factors in participants' responses to items on this sub-scale.

Table 6

*Body Image Satisfaction: Correlations*

	Body Image Effect on Peer Interactions	Body Image: Actual Self vs. Ideal Self (Female Priorities)	Body Image: Actual Self vs. Ideal Self (Gender Neutral Priorities)	Body Image: Low Priority	Body Image: High Priority
Body Image Effect on Life in General	r = .918 n = 150 p < .001			r = .459 n = 149 p < .001	r = .385 n = 147 p < .001
Body Image: Actual Self vs. Ideal Self (Male Priorities)		r = .928 n = 151 p < .001	r = .982 n = 151 p < .001		
Body Image: Low Priority	r = .407 n = 145 p < .001				
Body Image: High Priority	r = .421 n = 144 p < .001				

## Cosmetic Surgery

The Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance construct can be divided into two sub-constructs: overall acceptance of cosmetic surgery and willingness to seek cosmetic surgery for self. The overall acceptance of cosmetic surgery sub-scale consisted of seven survey items ( $\alpha = 0.978$ ), and the willingness to seek cosmetic surgery for self sub-scale also consisted of 7 survey items ( $\alpha = 0.965$ ). These two sub-constructs were shown to have a strong, positive correlation to each other ( $r = 0.975$ ,  $n = 151$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

However, there were no significant differences based on demographic or institutional

factors in participants' overall cosmetic surgery acceptance scores ( $M = 2.614$ ;  $SD = 1.008$ ) and willingness to seek cosmetic surgery for self scores ( $M = 2.607$ ;  $SD = 1.364$ ).

Table 7

*Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance by Institution Category*

	Overall Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance	Willingness to Seek Cosmetic Surgery for Self
EDI	2.920 (0.9299)	2.86 (1.033)
EDI-H	3.131 (1.1913)	3.08 (1.240)
PWI	2.697 (1.0282)	2.67 (1.080)
PHI	3.0909 (0.8944)	3.13 (1.014)
HBCU	2.5185 (1.3152)	2.46 (1.238)
Control	2.765 (1.4803)	2.76 (1.480)

### Social Comparisons

The Social Comparisons construct measured participants' tendency to make social comparisons—that is, compare themselves to their peers. This construct consisted of four survey items ( $\alpha = 0.902$ ). Regardless of differences in demographic and institutional factors, no significant differences in the ways that participants reported social comparison engagement were observed.

### Interactions Among Constructs

Despite being correlated with aspects of both Cosmetic Surgery and Body Image Satisfaction, social comparisons were found to have only a very weak, positive correlation to Diverse Peer Interactions. The results revealed that social comparisons had a strong, positive correlation to body image as a priority ( $r = 0.887$ ,  $n = 150$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Social comparisons were also found to have a moderate, positive correlation to body



image effect on social interactions ( $r = 0.400$ ,  $n = 150$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, social comparisons were shown to have a moderate, positive correlation to overall cosmetic surgery acceptance ( $r = 0.529$ ,  $n = 149$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as well as to willingness to seek cosmetic surgery for self ( $r = 0.546$ ,  $n = 148$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Social comparisons were also found to have a weak, positive correlation to body image satisfaction: importance ( $r = 0.393$ ,  $n = 150$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The overall cosmetic surgery acceptance sub-construct was shown to have a weak, positive correlation to body image satisfaction: actual self vs. ideal self ( $r = 0.366$ ,  $n = 146$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as well as a moderate, positive correlation to body image satisfaction: importance ( $r = 0.460$ ,  $n = 149$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The willingness to seek cosmetic surgery for self sub-construct was found to have a weak, positive correlation to body image satisfaction: actual self vs. ideal self ( $r = 0.383$ ,  $n = 147$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as well as a moderate, positive correlation to body image satisfaction: importance ( $r = 0.458$ ,  $n = 149$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The willingness to seek cosmetic surgery for self sub-construct was also found to have a weak, positive correlation to frequency of diverse peer interactions ( $r = 0.313$ ,  $n = 148$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The frequency of diverse peer interactions sub-construct was found to have a weak, positive correlation to body image satisfaction: importance ( $r = 0.327$ ,  $n = 149$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 8

*Correlations*

	Social Comparisons	Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance: Self	Body Image: Actual Self vs. Ideal Self (Gender Neutral Priorities)	Body Image: Actual Self vs. Ideal Self (Importance)
Body Image: Low Priority	r = .887 n = 150 p < .001			
Body Image: High Priority	r = .933 n = 148 p < .001			
Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance: Overall	r = .529 n = 149 p < .001	r = .976 n = 149 p < .001	r = .366 n = 146 p < .001	r = .460 n = 149 p < .001
Body Image: Actual Self vs. Ideal Self (Importance)		r = .458 n = 149 p < .001		
Body Image: Actual Self vs. Ideal Self (Gender Neutral Priorities)		r = .383 n = 147 p < .001		
Frequency of Diverse Peer Interactions: During College		r = .313 n = 148 p < .001		
Body Image Effect on Peer Interactions	r = .400 n = 150 p < .001			
Body Image Effect on Life in General	r = .371 n = 152 p < .001			

## Summary

Data collected from 159 participants were analyzed. The majority of participants were Caucasian and African American. For all four studied constructs, the data revealed that there were no overall significant differences among participants based on race, academic classification, place of residence, or institutional type. However, there were some significant differences observed regarding certain sub-constructs. For this study, freshmen reported being more comfortable interacting with different race peers than juniors. Also, African Americans were found to be the least likely of any racial group to engage in diverse peer interactions, regardless of institutional type. In regard to body image, participants reported higher body image satisfaction than expected as based on prior research. In terms of cosmetic surgery, this study's participants reported overall negative views of cosmetic surgery. For the social comparison construct, participants reported an overall low rate of comparing themselves to their peers. Furthermore, the interaction relationships among constructs were not significant.

## CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

This study had three primary goals. First, this study sought to investigate the extent to which diverse peer interactions occur at institutions of various student population racial compositions. The results revealed that participants attending EDI reported engaging in diverse peer interactions more frequently than participants attending HBCU. However, this was the only significant difference observed among institutional types. Second, this study aimed to investigate if and how diverse peer interactions influence college students' level of body image satisfaction. Overall, no correlation between diverse peer interactions and body image satisfaction was found. However, frequency of diverse peer interactions was found to have a weak, positive correlation to the level of importance participants placed on having their ideal self-body image match their actual self-body image. Third, this study's goal was to assess college students' views on cosmetic surgery, specifically their acceptance of and likelihood of undergoing cosmetic procedures in order to increase their body satisfaction. The results showed that, regardless of demographic and institutional factors, participants tended to view cosmetic surgery as unacceptable and were not willing to seek cosmetic surgery for themselves.

### Diverse Peer Interactions

Based on previous research and the concepts of homophily and propinquity, it was expected that students in the majority group at MDI would engage mostly in racially homogenous, homophily-characteristic peer interactions with peers of their own race/ethnicity (McPherson et al., 2001). On the contrary, it was expected that students in the minority group at MDI would engage mostly in racially mixed, propinquity-characteristic peer interactions with peers of other races (Blau & Schwartz, 1984;

Quillian & Campbell, 2003). However, the results of the study revealed that, overall, there were no significant differences in students' diverse peer interactions based on institutional type. In other words, students attending EDI were no more likely to engage in diverse peer interactions than were students attending MDI. This observation aligns with the concept of homophily, which states that individuals have a tendency to interact and form relationships with others who are similar to themselves in some aspect, regardless of environment or opportunities for engaging with other race individuals (McPherson et al., 2001).

Based on the idea of propinquity, it would be expected that students attending EDI would engage in diverse peer interactions more so than students attending MDI, simply due to increased exposure to peers of different races/ethnicities and increased opportunities for interactions with different race peers at EDI. It was shown that students attending EDI were significantly more likely than students attending HBCU to engage in conversations with peers of other races. Also, EDI students were also found to engage in diverse peer interactions at higher frequencies than students attending HBCU. These observations coincide with the concept of propinquity as well as with principles of contact theory (Blau & Schwartz, 1994; Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Stearns et al., 2009). According to contact theory, individuals are more likely to interact with each other and form relationships if they share the same social setting and environment (Stearns et al., 2009). Because students attending HBCU were almost entirely immersed in an environment of only same-race peers, there were fewer opportunities for these students to engage in diverse peer interactions.

Whereas the comparison of EDI to HBCU showed support for the idea of propinquity, other results seemed to provide evidence of homophily-characteristic interactions. In fact, it was observed that, regardless of the institutional type, students tended to gravitate toward interacting with peers of their same race/ethnicity. According to the results, it seems that African American students attending HBCU were the least likely of any racial group attending any institutional type to engage in diverse peer interactions—results that are to be expected based on any peer interaction ideology. However, it was found that, regardless of institutional type, African American students were the least likely to engage in conversations with peers of other races, and reported the lowest frequencies of diverse peer interactions. This observation is more characteristic of the concept of homophily rather than the concept of propinquity. Despite the social setting, environment, or opportunities for diverse peer interactions to occur, African American students seemed to prefer interacting with peers of their same race/ethnicity. Whereas Reitz et al. (2014) asserts that peer groups tend to become less homogenous as individuals reach adulthood, Blackwell et al. (1999) suggests that, due to previously shared experiences related to race and/or culture, individuals feel more comfortable interacting with peers of their same race and/or culture.

Additional information would be needed to explain African American students' affinity for homophily-characteristic peer interactions. According to Blackwell et al. (1999), individuals can feel culturally isolated when they become a part of the minority group in an environment or situation, and thereby tend to seek out and form peer relationships with others who are culturally most similar to themselves. Thereby, based on this idea and the concept of homophily, minority group individuals, like African

American students attending a PWI or PHI, would have a proclivity to seek out same-race peer interactions despite the more statistically probable option of engaging in diverse peer interactions as the concept of propinquity would suggest.

It is interesting to note that African American students attending the control group institution, which served as a representation of most institutions in the Southeast (i.e. institutions that are majority Caucasian but not overwhelmingly so), reported engaging in fewer racially homogenous, homophily-characteristic college organizations and social activities than did African American students attending EDI (Table 5). In other words, African American students attending the control institution were less likely to engage in same-race social activities and institutional organizations than were African American students attending EDI. It is also interesting to note that African American students attending the control institution reported engaging in more racially homogenous, homophily-characteristic college organizations and social activities than their counterparts attending PWI (Table 5). Put another way, African American students attending PWI were less likely to engage in same-race social activities and institutional organizations than were African American students attending the control institution. In fact, African American students attending PWI scored within the propinquity range for peer interactions. Based on racial population ratios and the principles of contact theory and propinquity, these results are to be expected (Moody, 2001; Stearns et al., 2009). This seems to support Moody's (2001) assertion that African American students attending institutions where they are the minority are likely to engage in diverse peer interactions due to propinquity ideology and racial population numbers.

However, based on the overall findings of this study concerning African American students, it is seen that African American students tend to engage in homophily-characteristic peer interactions when placed in an environment where racial population numbers increase the opportunity for engagement in same-race peer interactions. The findings of this study show that, as African American student numbers increase at institutions, African American students are more likely to engage in same-race peer interactions. On the contrary, based on the findings of this study, African American students are less likely to engage in same-race peer interactions when African American student numbers decrease at institutions. These findings are of interest considering that they are contradictory to the “cocooning” behavior of African American students that has been described by Tatum (1987). According to Tatum (1987), African American students attending institutions where they are the minority group, in terms of student population numbers, tend to seek out same-race peer groups in order to find acceptance and comfort. In this study, however, the exact opposite behavior was observed among African American students.

For all institutional types except HBCU and EDI-H, Caucasian students scored in the neutral range for the homophily vs. propinquity sub-construct. In other words, Caucasian students attending EDI were no more likely than Caucasian students attending PHI, PWI, and the control institution to engage in racially mixed college organizations and social activities, and engagement in these activities was neither propinquity nor homophily characteristic. In fact, Caucasian and African American students attending the control institution both reported social activity engagement that was more diverse and propinquity-characteristic than that of their counterparts at EDI. This finding is



interesting because it was expected that Caucasian students attending EDI would be more likely to engage in racially diverse social activities than their counterparts at PWI and the control institution due to racial population ratios and increased opportunity for diverse peer interactions (Stearns et al., 2009).

It was also expected that Caucasian students attending EDI would be less likely to engage in racially diverse social activities compared to their counterparts attending PHI due to racial population ratios (Stearns et al., 2009). Since these expectations were not observed, it seems that even as the Caucasian population increases in an institutional setting, Caucasian students continue to engage in racially diverse social activities at a similar rate. In fact, the findings of this study showed that Caucasian students' engagement in racially diverse social activities at PHI, where they are a minority group, was consistent with that of Caucasian students attending EDI, where opportunity for diverse peer interactions is less than at a PHI for Caucasian students.

It was hypothesized that students attending EDI would report participation in the most racially diverse college organizations and social activities. However, the results revealed that Caucasian and African American students attending PWI and the control institution reported social activity engagement that was more diverse than that of their counterparts at EDI. Not surprising, Caucasian students attending HBCU reported engagement in the most racially diverse, propinquity-characteristic social activities out of any racial group at any institutional type. Due to racial population numbers, this finding was to be expected.

Caucasian students attending EDI-H reported engagement in social activities that were highly racially homogenous. This could be due to language barriers and/or cultural

differences. In the American Southeast, African Americans and Caucasians have come to face and be more sensitive to their racially-based cultural differences. However, Caucasians and Hispanics may not have overcome their racially-based cultural differences to the extent that Caucasians and African Americans have. This may explain why Caucasians attending EDI-H reported a greater tendency toward homophily-characteristic social activity engagement than did their counterparts attending EDI. Another possible explanation could be the “cocooning” behavior most often exhibited by African Americans attending PWI (Tatum, 1987). According to Tatum (1987), students in the minority group tend to form peer relationships with others who resemble themselves. Stearns et al. (2009) postulates that this “cocooning” or homophily-characteristic behavior could be due to minority groups experiencing prior or on-going occurrences of either direct or indirect racial discrimination at the expense of the majority group in a particular setting or situation.

As expected, Hispanic students exhibited homophily-characteristic social activity engagement when attending PHI, and propinquity-characteristic social activity engagement when attending EDI. When attending PWI, Hispanic students’ social engagement endeavors followed neither the homophily model nor the propinquity model. This is somewhat surprising, as it was expected that Hispanic students would exhibit a stronger tendency for propinquity-characteristic social activity engagement when attending an institution where they were in the minority group (Blau & Schwartz, 1984; Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Stearns et al., 2009). However, it should be noted that the number of Hispanic respondents in this study were few, and this small number of participants could have altered the results surrounding this group. When attending EDI,

PHI, or HBCU, Asian American students engaged in college organization and social activities that were neither propinquity- nor homophily-characteristic. However, when attending PWI, Asian American students reported engagement in somewhat propinquity-characteristic social activities. Though, it is important to note that, similar to Hispanic participants, the number of Asian American participants in this study were few, and this low response rate could have impacted the results. Whereas engagement in college organizations and social activities is not synonymous with diverse peer interactions entirely, voluntary participation in such endeavors is indicative of students' acceptance of other race peers (Blackwell et al., 1999). In other words, students' willingness to voluntarily engage in racially diverse, non-mandatory activities may be a better indication of their views on race and acceptance of different-race peers than assessing the racial makeup of their friendship groups alone, and vice versa.

The finding that freshmen were more comfortable interacting with peers of different races than were juniors suggests that the college environment may influence students' diverse peer interactions. Regardless of students' diverse peer interactions prior to college, it is seen that students' interactions, or at least their comfortability with diverse peer interactions, changes over the course of their college tenure. Prior to college, there were no significant differences in students' diverse peer interactions—as students, on average, mainly interacted with peers of the same race. However, at the start of college, it was seen that students began to engage in more diverse peer interactions, regardless of race, gender, or institutional type. Then, for some unexplained reason, students begin to engage in more homophily-characteristic diverse peer interactions by junior year. There could be many reasons for this observation.

One possible explanation might be attributed to transfer students. Because the cost of attending a four-year institution can be very expensive today, many students are choosing to attend two-year community colleges for the first two years of their higher education career in order to cut down on costs (Smith, 2015). Because students attending community colleges are likely to live off-campus and the results of this study showed that students living on-campus were more likely to engage in diverse peer interactions than were students living off-campus, it is likely that transfer students who enroll at four-year institutions during their junior year of study bring with them the peer interaction behaviors in which they engaged during their tenure at the community college level—interactions that were most likely characteristic of homophily interaction ideology. After all, it was observed that seniors reported being more comfortable interacting with peers of different races than reported by juniors, which seems to suggest that some unidentified phenomenon occurring between students' junior and senior years of college leads to students engaging in more diverse peer interactions. Thereby, it seems that the environment created by a four-year institution has the potential to influence students' diverse peer interactions, especially if students live on-campus. Another possible explanation might be attributed to age as a factor. According to Reitz et al. (2014), peer groups tend to become less homogenous as individuals grow toward adulthood. This assertion may explain the observed progression of reported increases in diverse peer interaction frequencies as participant age increased in the study. However, it does not explain the drop in reported diverse peer interaction frequencies that was observed among participants in their junior year.

## Body Image Satisfaction

In regard to body image, the findings of this study were interesting because, despite a substantial amount of prior research has provided evidence of body image satisfaction differences existing between men and women as well as among women of different racial/ethnic backgrounds, there were no significant differences in the ways that men and women nor women of different races reported levels of body image satisfaction in this study (Gillen, 2007; Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Pompper & Koenig, 2004; Roberts et al., 2006). Based on prior research, it was to be expected that women would report lower levels of body image satisfaction than reported by men (Gillen, 2007; Grossbard et al., 2011). Furthermore, it was to be expected that Caucasian women would report lower levels of body image satisfaction than women of other racial groups, and African American women and Hispanic women attending HBCU and PHI, respectively, would report the highest levels of body image satisfaction (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Pompper & Koenig, 2004; Roberts et al., 2006). However, these observations were not made in this study.

This study's finding that women reported being just as satisfied with their bodies as men may be indicative of several factors. One possibility is that women are becoming more satisfied with their bodies. Another possibility is that men are actually experiencing lower body satisfaction. In either case, there is no research, to date, to suggest that such shift(s) is occurring. In fact, increases in cosmetic surgery procedures for both men and women over the past two decades seems to suggest that both genders are becoming less satisfied with their bodies (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2015).

Failure to observe differences could be associated with the culture of the geographic region that was the setting of the study. The findings by Paulk et al. (2014) suggest that culture as dictated by geographic region within a single country can substantially influence individuals' body image views. The Southeast may be unique in this aspect when compared to other regions in the country like the Northwest, Midwest, or Northeast which are largely populated by one racial group and dominated by the majority culture. According to Wilson et al. (2013), the American Southeast has a unique culture that has been shaped by its rich history and vast racial/ethnic diversity. Because of the Southeast's long history of racial/ethnic diversity, it could be that individuals living in the region have come to share a collective body image ideal that is encompassing of the region's diverse racial-based cultural ideologies regarding body image—embodying an ideal body image that is more representative of multiple cultures. In other words, due to the Southeast's rich history consisting of frequent periods of changing racial and cultural dynamics that have shaped the region, the Southeast's collective culture has come to be comprised of a culmination of several different ideological aspects from the region's numerous historical and present-day cultural groups (Wilson et al., 2013). Therefore, this culmination of different cultures into a collective, regional culture may promote the acceptance of a broad range of body image ideals among individuals living in the region.

There were also no significant differences in participants' reported body image satisfaction based on academic classification, institutional type, or place of residency. This observation is interesting because it seems to suggest that, while emergence in the college environment created by a four-year institution in the Southeast may influence

students' diverse peer interactions, it may not have the same effect on students' body image satisfaction. Based on prior research, differences in participants' reported body image satisfaction based on institution type were to be expected. Research has shown that African American women and Hispanic women attending institutions where they are among the majority group are less likely to subscribe to the body image ideals of mainstream culture, and are thereby more likely to express greater body satisfaction than their counterparts who attend non-HBCU/non-PHI and who subscribe to mainstream culture's body image ideals (Baugh et al., 2010; Lovejoy, 2001; Pompper & Koenig, 2004).

Furthermore, according to Greenwood and Dal Cin (2012), Caucasian women tend to report lower body image satisfaction than African American women in general. Therefore, based on the substantial body of prior research on body image and race, it was expected that students of different races would report significantly different levels of body image satisfaction, and these differences should have manifested themselves as differences among institutional types as well. The discrepancies between this study's findings regarding body image satisfaction and findings from other body image satisfaction studies may be largely explained by this study's low participation rate, especially from Hispanic students and PHI. This low and disproportionate response rate undoubtedly limited the researcher's ability to compare institutional types and racial groups.

Overall, participants viewed their self-body image as being neither a high priority nor a low priority in their lives. However, despite not viewing body image as a high priority, participants reported that their feelings regarding body image had a slightly

negative effect on their lives in general as well as on their social interactions. These findings coincide with previous research that shows how body image dissatisfaction can negatively impact various aspects of college students' lives and lead to engagement in unhealthy and unsafe behaviors such as disordered eating and risky sexual and drinking behavior (Dakanalis et al., 2014; DeHart et al., 2009; Gillen et al., 2006; Rosengard et al., 2006).

Students reported that their ideal body image matched near exactly with their actual body image. Moreover, the results revealed that participants felt that having their ideal body image match that of their actual body image was important but not very important. Despite not viewing body image as being highly important or a high priority, students reported having overall positive views of their bodies. Interestingly, although students reported not viewing body image as being highly important and also reported having overall positive views of their bodies, students reported body image as negatively impacting their lives and social interactions. These findings seem somewhat contradictory to each other and are of particular interest because there is much prior evidence to suggest that women, especially college-age women, are, by large, dissatisfied with their body image (Neighbors & Sobal, 2007; Palmer, 2013; Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2013).

No link between diverse peer interactions and body image satisfaction was found. Also, no link between social comparisons and body image satisfaction was found, and only a weak, positive correlation was found between social comparisons and frequency of diverse peer interactions. These findings suggest that increased opportunities for diverse peer interactions do not lead to increased incidences of social comparisons to peers of the



same race or to peers of different races. Furthermore, these findings suggest that neither diverse peer interactions nor social comparisons have any significant influence on students' body image satisfaction, which is contradictory to some previous research which suggests that increased exposure to different-race peers can alter body image satisfaction. In fact, research has shown that college women's body image views and levels of satisfaction can be greatly influenced by peers and social comparisons to peers (Allison & Park, 2004; Carlson-Jones, 2004; Lindner et al., 2008).

These findings, in conjunction with social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory, seem to support the notion that the Southeast's unique, assimilated culture could be responsible, in part, for students' seemingly positive views toward body image. In fact, study participants did not report making social comparisons often. It was seen that increased incidence of diverse peer interactions led to a slight increase in social comparisons but this increase in social comparisons was not significant and had no effect on body image satisfaction. According to SCompT, it is human nature to self-compare to others, and according to SDT, self-comparisons to others leads to self-discrepancy that can only be corrected through changing oneself (Festinger, 1954; Higgins, 1987). The findings of this study did not follow these principles, and this could be due to students either not comparing themselves to peers or not seeing peers of different races as "different" or possessing of different cultural body image ideals.

### Cosmetic Surgery

Study participants were found to have slightly negative views about cosmetic surgery—slightly disagreeing with the notion that cosmetic surgery is a socially acceptable means of improving one's body image satisfaction. Moreover, despite

growing trends in cosmetic surgery, participants reported a lack of interest in pursuing plastic surgery for themselves. Because students had such positive body image self-perceptions, this may explain why students did not view cosmetic surgery as more important, acceptable, or needed. Although limited, research on cosmetic surgery views and acceptance among college students shows that college students who are accepting of and willing to seek out cosmetic surgery tend to have low self-esteem and low body satisfaction (Farshidfar et al., 2013; Furnham & Levitas, 2012; Markey & Markey, 2009). There was a moderate, positive correlation observed between social comparisons and cosmetic surgery, suggesting that more occurrences of social comparisons may lead to more acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Furthermore, it was determined that frequency of diverse peer interactions had only a weak, positive correlation to cosmetic surgery, meaning that frequency of diverse peer interactions had no significant influence on participants' cosmetic surgery acceptance.

Based on all results, it seems that the Southeast has a unique culture in terms of body image that assimilates the views of the region's diverse racially-based cultures. In other words, it is likely that no significant differences in students' body image satisfaction and cosmetic surgery acceptance were observed because the body image ideals of no single racially-based culture dominates the region. It is also a possibility that today's college students are much more accepting of each other's differences than previous generations were accepting of differences. In recent years, there has been a national push for greater acceptance of others who may be gay, transgender, disabled, or otherwise different, and based on this study's results, it appears that the idea of acceptance may be reaching over to encompass different body images as well.

## Implications

The results of this study suggest that higher education institutions should look to establish extra-curricular activities and experiences that promote greater cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions among students. Leading this movement should be the student affairs and campus housing departments, as institutional-orchestrated student activities and campus housing has been shown to increase diverse peer interactions (Festinger et al., 1950; Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2006). According to Laird (2005), diverse peer interactions help individuals to grow and improve in various areas including increasing self-confidence and improving critical thinking. Furthermore, by making campuses more racially and culturally inclusive and by promoting awareness concerning cultural responsiveness, institutions would be preparing students to enter a global and culturally diverse workforce (Meador, 2004).

Also, institutions should look to use information from this study and similar studies to help with the establishment of support groups geared toward addressing psychological issues concerning body image self-perception and related issues such as disordered eating. Although the results of this study revealed that students had an overall positive self-body image view, other research shows that body image dissatisfaction affects many students, and this dissatisfaction can lead to students engaging in unhealthy behaviors that can lead to detrimental outcomes (Dakanalis et al., 2014; DeHart et al., 2009; Gillen et al., 2006; Neighbors & Sobal, 2007; Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2013).

## Limitations

The low response rate by Asian American and Hispanic participants was a major limitation to the study. Because of the low response rate by these racial groups, the

findings surrounding these groups may not be accurately representative. Furthermore, the low response rate by Hispanic students may have caused the PHI in this study to be misrepresented.

Because of the low response rate by participants, the results of this study should not be used to make generalizations about the behaviors of college students in the southeast region of the United States. Also, the disproportion in responses from institutional types and racial groups further disqualifies the results of this study from being used to make generalizations about the larger Southeastern student population. Only 14.5% of participants reported attending PHI and only 11.3% reported attending the control group institution. Moreover, Hispanic participants only accounted for 12.1% of study participants, despite Hispanic students comprising 61% and 76% of the surveyed PHI (NCES, 2014).

The scope of the survey instrument used in the study may have also served as a limitation. Because the study and its survey instrument assessed students' views and behaviors on a general and broad scale, this may offer some explanation for the study's failure to observe significant differences among participants of different demographic groups and institutional types. A more in-depth assessment may have more accurately pinpointed differences among participant groups.

Lastly, the geographic region that was the focus of this study may have posed as a limitation due to the region's uniqueness of cultural integration. In other words, the culture of the South is unique in that it encompasses an integration of the several racially-based cultural ideologies that have co-existed in the region for centuries (Wilson et al., 2013). Because the Southeast has such a unique regional culture, this may further offer

some explanation for the study's failure to observe significant differences among participants of different demographic groups and institutional types.

#### Future Research

Because the results of this study proved to be contradictory to much prior research, future research should examine the diverse peer interactions, body image satisfaction, and cosmetic surgery views of college students in the remaining regions of the country. By doing so, the influential factors behind students' differences in views can be determined. As shown by the study by Paulk et al. (2014), it may be that geographic region, in addition to race and gender, is a large contributor to students' social interactions and body image views. Furthermore, future research should delve deeper into the relationship among students' place of residency, peer interactions, and body image satisfaction. This study showed that students who reported living on-campus were more likely than students living off-campus to engage in diverse peer interactions. Therefore, place of residency as a factor in diverse peer interactions as well as the effects of these interactions should be further explored. Moreover, further research should focus on the effects of diverse peer interactions on other aspects of students' lives beyond body image and cosmetic surgery views. Body image is just one aspect of students' psychological well-being. Other aspects of students' psychological well-being, in conjunction with peer interaction effects, during students' formative college years should also be examined in order to better help institutions promote healthy learning and living campus environments for students.

## Summary

It was hypothesized that students attending more racially diverse institutions would engage in more diverse peer interactions than students attending less racially diverse institutions. However, the results of the study revealed that race was more of an influencer in diverse peer interactions than was institutional type. African American students were found to be least likely of all racial groups to engage in diverse peer interactions but their engagement in college organizations and social activities that are racially diverse seems to match the expected outcomes as proposed by contact theory and propinquity ideology. It was also hypothesized that Caucasian women would report the least body image satisfaction. On the contrary, it was determined that there were no significant differences in students' reported body image satisfaction, regardless of race or gender. In regard to cosmetic surgery views, participants overwhelmingly reported unfavorable views of cosmetic surgery—expressing an overall lack of acceptance of cosmetic surgery as a means of body image satisfaction improvement. Because the results of this study are contradictory to much previous research concerning diverse peer interactions, body image satisfaction, and cosmetic surgery, additional research is needed in order to further explain these results.

## APPENDIX A – IRB APPROVAL LETTERS



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI**

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### **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](http://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: 16022404

PROJECT TITLE: Implications of Diverse Peer Interactions on Body Image Satisfaction and Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance Among College Students

PROJECT TYPE: New Project

RESEARCHER(S): Shamekia Woods

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology

DEPARTMENT: Educational Studies and Research

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 02/29/2016 to 02/28/2017

**Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.**

**Institutional Review Board**



EAST TENNESSEE STATE  
UNIVERSITY

Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707  
Phone: (423) 439-6053 Fax: (423) 439-6060

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**IRB APPROVAL – Initial Exempt**

March 31, 2016

Shamekia Woods

RE: Implications of Diverse Peer Interactions on Body Image Satisfaction and  
Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance Among College Students

IRB#: c0316.25e

ORSPA#: ,

On **March 31, 2016**, an exempt approval was granted in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Policies. No continuing review is required. The exempt approval will be reported to the convened board on the next agenda.

- New protocol submission xForm, Bibliography, CITI training report for PI, PI resume, ETSU recruitment letters, consent introduction and questionnaire, Unaffiliated Investigator Agreement

**Projects involving Mountain States Health Alliance must also be approved by MSHA following IRB approval prior to initiating the study.**

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others must be reported to the IRB (and VA R&D if applicable) within 10 working days.

Proposed changes in approved research cannot be initiated without IRB review and approval. The only exception to this rule is that a change can be made prior to IRB approval when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the research subjects [21 CFR 56.108 (a)(4)]. In such a case, the IRB must be promptly informed of the change following its implementation (within 10 working days) on Form 109 ([www.etsu.edu/irb](http://www.etsu.edu/irb)). The IRB will review the change to determine that it is consistent with ensuring the subject's continued welfare.

Sincerely,  
Stacey Williams, Chair  
ETSU Campus IRB



Accredited since December 2005



DATE: April 11, 2016

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Shamekia Woods  
113 North 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue  
Hattiesburg, MS 39401

FROM: Dr. Sophia Leggett, *S. Leggett*  
IRB Chair

Re: Protocol entitled: "Pilot Study: Implications of Diverse Peer Interactions on Body Image Satisfaction and Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance Among College Students"

Department: Educational Studies and Research-University of Southern Mississippi

The Jackson State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application and has come to the conclusion your responses are satisfactory and meet the requirements for protection of human participants as stipulated by the Federal government. Your application received an **Expedited** approval according to 45 CFR §46.110 This approval is good for **one year** from the date of this letter.

Any adverse reactions or problems resulting from this investigation must be reported immediately to the university Institutional Review Board. If you decide to modify or change your procedures in any way, please notify the IRB office in writing. We will review your request in the context of your complete application. If the changes are approved, you will receive written notification for the approval.

Any research that continues beyond one year should be resubmitted for approval before the end of each year so there is no lapse. Contact the IRB office for the extension form and the submission requirements before the end of March 2017.

cc: Dr. Dorris Gardner, Dean  
Graduate School

Dr. Kyna Shelley

**NOTICE OF CERTIFICATION  
IRB EXPEDITED REVIEW**



**DATE:** March 14, 2016

**TO:** Shamekia Woods, Educational Studies and Research

**FROM:** Philip J. Moberg, NKU IRB Chair

**RE:** IRB Protocol Titled: *Implications of Diverse Peer Interactions on Body Image Satisfaction and Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance Among College Students*

IRB Protocol # 16-109, 16022404 USM

Certified Approval Date: March 14, 2016

The NKU Institutional Review Board (IRB) certifies that the research protocol referenced above has been reviewed and approved. As the principal investigator of this study, you assume the following reporting responsibilities:

**CONTINUING REVIEW:** Not applicable unless changes are made to the study. Ongoing IRB oversight is not required. You will receive an email near your annual approval date requesting an update on the study status.

**AMENDMENTS:** Investigators are required to report on these forms ANY changes to the research study (such as design, procedures, consent forms, or subject population, including size). To apply for IRB approval for protocol revision, complete the IRB Application, indicating that you are seeking to revise your approved study. <http://gero.nku.edu/research/rgc/irb/irb.html>. Attach to this application a copy of the proposed revisions and your consent form. The new procedure may not be initiated until IRB approval has been given. PIs also are required to report unanticipated problems to the IRB immediately.

**DATA RETENTION:** Investigators are required to retain all data for five years after the end of the study per HHS 45 CFR 46.115(b). Research involving HIPAA personal health identifiers must be retained for six years after the end of the study per HHS 45 CFR 164.528

**AUDIT OR INSPECTION REPORTS:** Investigators are required to provide to the IRB a copy of any audit or inspection reports or findings issued to them by regulatory agencies, cooperative research groups, contract research organizations, the sponsor, or the funding agency.

**COMPLETION:** You are required to notify the IRB office when your study is completed (data collection is finished). At this time we request an email or hard copy memo indicating completion.

We suggest you keep this letter with your copy of the approved protocol. Please refer to the exact project title and protocol number in any future correspondence with our office. All correspondence must be typed.

[Human Subject Research Federal Regulations](#)

Federal Wide Assurance #FWA00009011

Enclosure: Documentation of Review and Approval Signatures

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