

A Land of Golden Girls: Investigating Body Image at St. Olaf

“Here people like to pretend that you can be perfect, and if you’re overweight or big-boned, you aren’t perfect because you aren’t ideal. It’s all about the Olaf image—it’s about the college as much as it’s about the people that go here—just look at the logo, how the school presents itself—all golden, just really high up and prestigious, and fat doesn’t go with being prestigious. It’s that you have to be thin to be beautiful, to go along with it all...” (Angela)

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the issues surrounding body image and dissatisfaction problems in the female students of St. Olaf College. Past research was drawn upon and used to evaluate the findings, as were theoretical frameworks like the feminist social constructionist perspective, in an attempt to further understand the ways in which body image is a social creation. After conducting and analyzing data from ten interviews with upper-class female students, it can be argued not only that body image issues are prevalent on campus, but also that these are specific in certain ways to this campus and related to the overall environment, image of the school, and of the “typical” student. Subjects recognized a large difference between physical appearance standards at this school when compared to others. Most recognized a maturation process that has positively impacted their body image between their first and last years on campus.

Setting/Community

An essential ingredient in understanding any issue is the social context in which it is immersed; to get a complete picture of the issues and ideas surrounding body image in women at St Olaf, it is important to understand the conditions of student life here. What is it like to be a student at St Olaf? Who attends this school? The following paragraphs will provide a description of the campus and its facilities, as well as of the student population and other factors that may affect community life.

St Olaf College is a private, Lutheran-affiliated four-year educational institution, located on a hill pleasantly called “Manitou Heights,” which separates the college from Northfield, Minnesota. Northfield has a population of about 15,000 when both of its colleges (St Olaf and, across the river, Carleton) are in session. It also contains a large Malt O Meal factory, a main street lined with shops and restaurants, a few bars, a small movie theater, and a bowling alley. This small town atmosphere provides quite the contrast to the

lively metropolitan area of Minneapolis and St Paul, located about forty miles to the north.

A 345-acre campus filled with impressive limestone buildings and about 700 acres of adjacent natural lands, St Olaf aims to provide a comfortable home for its 3,000 students. Over ninety-five percent of these students live on campus, and while transportation off “the hill” is available, facilities on campus are made to be sufficient to provide for all areas of life. On campus housing is comprised of ten dorms, four are strictly filled with first-year students, a fifth a mix of first-year and upper-class students (sophomores, juniors and seniors), with the rest reserved for the upper-classes. All dorms are coed by floor, and first-year dorms are subdivided into “corridors,” consisting of a pair of Junior Counselors (two third-year students who act as advisors and counselors to the incoming students) and approximately sixteen first-years, all living on the same section of the same floor. This design fosters community and friendships; residence life is not something that this school takes lightly, as is noted on the college’s web page:

In the conviction that significant learning takes place outside of the classroom, the college strives to educate students through positive, challenging and supportive residence life experiences... promoting a healthy living/learning environment in which this education takes place through an emphasis on providing educational, cultural, recreational, social and spiritual opportunities for growth; a commitment to the development of sensitive and responsible individuals; and the enrichment of lifelong friendships. One of the major roles of the residence life staff is to help foster the development of community...helping to develop an awareness and sensitivity to expectations and standards around which communities are formed and educate through positive confrontational dialogue.

Upper-class students have a wider array of options, including single, double or triple rooms, and in certain cases, quads and quintets. Honor houses are also an option for upper-class students; segregated by sex, there are eighteen such houses available, five of which are designated for foreign languages (for example, the French house, composed of French students who only speak French in the house), with the rest of the houses available for “focus interests.” This year’s groups include the Wellness House, WomanSafe House, and AIDS A.W.A.R.E. House.

The recently erected Buntrock Commons serves a base for many activities. Acting as a physical and symbolic link between the religious and academic pinnacles of the campus, it is a building that connects the main library to the chapel, and is the crossroads of community life. Three eating establishments

are available in Buntrock, including: Stav Hall, the luxurious two-floor cafeteria (complete with large windows, flowers on the tables, and a section of secluded booths to compliment the wide array of food selections available) where all students dine; the Cage, a coffee-shop/delicatessen popular with upper-class students and faculty; and the Lion's Pause, a student-run recreational space complete with cheap food, board and video games, cable TV, comfortable chairs and a stage that brings to light musical acts, speakers and other entertaining events. Buntrock also houses a small movie theater, a bookstore, the campus radio station, the post office, a ballroom and dining room, as well as numerous smaller rooms designed for meetings, speakers and other gatherings.

Other facilities include the new athletic center, Tostrud (adjoined to Skoglund Athletic Center, which houses the gymnasium and swimming pool), which boasts of exercise machines and an aerobics facility, an elevated walking and jogging ring, five tennis courts and a six lane track, as well as a climbing wall and weight training facilities. At the facility's dedication in September 2002, President Christopher M. Thomforde said, "Healthy living, wellness, and recreation are crucial to freeing young men and women to become whole... through this new center we will provide our students with an important resource in which to learn and grow"(http://www.stolaf.edu). The college's commitment to the growth of its students is evident not only in the facilities it provides and maintains, but also in its mission statement:

St Olaf provides an education committed to the liberal arts, rooted in the Christian gospel, and incorporating a global perspective. In the conviction that life is more than a livelihood, it focuses on what is ultimately worthwhile and fosters the development of the whole person in mind, body, and spirit. St Olaf College strives to be an inclusive community, respecting those of differing backgrounds and beliefs. Through its curriculum, campus life, and off-campus programs, it stimulates student's critical thinking and heightens their moral sensitivity; it encourages them to be seekers of truth, leading lives of unselfish service to others; it challenges them to be responsible and knowledgeable citizens of the world. (Ibid.)

To foster such a community and atmosphere of learning and growing, the admission process involves not just looking at grades, but also at extra-curricular involvement, leadership roles and community service activities. Those admitted are "complete" students, who have done more than just take classes, and who will take advantage of the opportunities at St Olaf while contributing back to the community. Looking at CIRP data from the first year students who entered St Olaf in the fall of 2000, a few of the figures

are particularly illuminating. Nearly all (94.3 percent) of the students described themselves as White/Caucasian, 46 percent reported their average grade in high school to be an A (with the rest of the population following closely behind in the A-/B+ range), and over half (51.3 percent) of the students put their parents' total household income bracket at above \$75,000/year. Furthermore, 90.4 percent of this group of students rated their academic ability as above average when compared to the average person of their age, and 80.8 percent of them rated their drive to succeed as similarly above average.

What do all of these things say about the student life and community at St Olaf? The figures seem to show this is a predominantly white, middle to upper class group of over-achieving students. This research project aims for some form of understanding of how factors such as these may affect the problems and issues surrounding women's body image.

The Problem

"This campus is obsessed with body image." (Theresa)

"All of my friends have had eating disorders or disordered eating since they've come to college, including myself." (Lindsay)

"There's a stereotype here that brainwashes you. So many girls on this campus are thin, blonde, at first you sort of buy into it..." (Andrea)

"I know a lot of people at Olaf who don't have a reasonable outlook [on their body image], and I can see how coming here and seeing all these tiny [women] who eat cantaloupe three times a day can really be a problem. It's easy to get sucked in, [because] this is such a concentrated community. There's a huge number of people who live their lives "that" way [with disordered eating habits]. It's really infectious." (Laura)

It's no secret that many American women today are dissatisfied with their bodies, with the trend worsening appreciably over time into what has been termed "normative discontent" (Cash 1994). Susan Bordo also argues that preoccupation with fat, diet and slenderness in women is normative, suggesting that Western culture surrounds women with clear messages that fat must be "destroyed," "eliminated," "burned" (Grogan 55). Literature and research abound on this subject, exploring such topics as the "cult of thinness," current fitness and dieting obsessions, and the effects of the fashion and media industries upon standards of beauty, appearance and the ideal weight for women. Sharlene Hesse-Biber describes in her book *Am I Thin Enough Yet?*, in part an ethnographic study of college-aged women over eight years, how

American women have become obsessed with thinness. In a culture in which the slim figure has come to represent health as well as beauty, the ideal body type has become steadily slimmer since the 1960s, a trend fueled by large-scale market interests that exploit women's insecurities about their looks. Hesse-Biber states:

American food, weight loss, and cosmetic industries thrive on the purchases made to obtain the unobtainable goal of physical perfection. The slim and flawless cover girl is an icon created by capitalism for the sake of profit. Millions of women pay it homage. (4)

American women spend more than \$30 billion annually in the pursuit of losing weight, believing that they can have the right body if only they consume more and more products, like pills, a food plan, or a membership in a self-help group (39). However, there is virtually no data available to support the weight loss industries claims, but what medical research has instead proposed is a theory that "body weight may be regulated by a biologic set point system that 'defends' a particular weight by maintaining energy balance and food consumption at certain levels" (41). Hesse-Biber adds: "Given that most women's bodies do not naturally fit the thin ideal, these trends are destructive to women's health, self-esteem, and economic and social advancement within society" (6).

The quotations above, taken from the women I interviewed, seem to show that St Olaf is no exception to this pervasive "cult of slenderness." In fact, this college seems not only affected, but nearly consumed by it. Disturbing and unproven, but oft-cited, statistics float around the student body, myths that estimate the number who struggle with an eating disorder at anywhere from twenty to fifty percent of the female population. Steve O'Neill, director of the Counseling Center, has figures on the number of women who come into the counseling center with an eating disorder as their number one problem, which have remained stable at between seven and ten percent of the total number of students who seek counseling over the last ten years. What he has noticed, though, within the last year or two, is a widespread and false rumor that St. Olaf has the worst eating disorder problems of any college campus, which he says is "simply not true." However, because of the nature of eating disorders, which are very secretive and resistant to treatment, it is difficult to estimate an exact number of women who struggle with one. O'Neill recognizes the issue of body image and dissatisfaction as significant on campus, and designates three different realms for students who struggle with such problems: one containing those who meet clinical standards for an eating disorder, another group who are "disordered eaters," who don't necessarily meet clinical standards, but for

whom eating and body dissatisfaction problems are a consuming influence, and a third, large, group of individuals who eat enough, but who have a significant amount of body dissatisfaction and preoccupation with food, and often compare themselves to their peers on campus.

I became interested in this subject specifically this year, though it is something I have discussed with friends at least since middle school, and definitely since arriving at college. Living in a “pod,” surrounded by nine other similarly aged women, I found myself unable to ignore the constant comments and complaints about wanting to lose weight, or of the battles to find something relatively flattering to wear, or in the little reminders and self-scolding tactics as “I really need to work out today.” I began investigating the issue further, not just through a constant critique of women’s magazines, but in literature and research on the subject, most of which attack a society that fosters such a “thin=good, fat=bad” mentality. Question upon question arose in my mind, from these materials, and from discussions with my academic advisor and with friends:

- o What drives women to struggle so much with their body images?
- o Why do we seem to spend so much time thinking out our bodies (and body images), and thus what are we not thinking about?
- o How is our body image formed and how does being at St Olaf affect this process?

I’ve heard many a discussion of the image of St Olaf and how it may play into such processes, ranging from the perky students smiling at you when you open the college website, to the golden banner in the college logo or the extravagance in certain features of Buntrock. I’ve also heard many lay claims to the “type” of student this school attracts—the cute, blonde, perfectionist, do-gooder type dressed as a J-Crew model and sporting a Nalgene water bottle. Do these factors play into, and perhaps exaggerate, the problem of women’s body image? In exploring this idea, I spoke with Renee Sauter, the Wellness Program Coordinator on campus, who is familiar with body image issues and an advocate and counselor to those who may suffer with such problems. She finds it frustrating and confusing that St Olaf is home to so many privileged young people, who have so many other things together, yet can’t get past struggles with their bodies or with eating disorders. She added, “Everyone that comes here faces the same messages, and eats at the same caf, so why are some better equipped than others [to face societal pressures]?”

As a place that prides itself on being an open, welcoming and friendly community that fosters intellectual, spiritual and physical growth, it seems contradictory that St Olaf might also be a breeding ground of sorts for eating

disorders and other body image problems. This school is filled with intelligent, courteous individuals known for their musical talents and for the large number who study abroad each year. As the Office of Institutional Research and Planning reports, nearly all students return after their freshman year, with the first-year retention rate for the 2002-3 school year at ninety-three percent, and the size of the first-year class has been growing steadily over the past several years (<http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/irp>). Clearly St Olaf, however much body image issues may affect and warp young women's minds here, still maintains an attractive atmosphere to some extent. But do ideals of community, growth and awareness conflict with a culture of competition both among women and with their own bodies? Or might a connection exist? How might both a welcoming, friendly, academically-rich environment also foster eating disorders and other dissatisfied body problems? And how do all of these ideas fit into a larger context, beyond St Olaf and its lofty hill?

To help provide a base from which to explore these ideas, I sought out a theoretical framework; I found many overlapping theoretical ideas, and attempted to keep these in mind as I began the data collection process. According to Liz Frost, author of *Young Women and the Body: A Feminist Sociology*, theorists within the feminist social constructionist perspective hold that what women do and who they are is the product of the intersection of a number of powerful, historically and socially located, strands of thought or groupings of belief (31). She postulates:

“Woman,” as both the subjectively experienced identity and the external description, is “positioned”—both circumscribed and empowered—by virtue of various discourses of the female subject. Ascendant among these prescriptions for womanhood are: (1) those which insist that a woman is her body; (2) that women are the “deviant” category—the “other”—from a male model of a “normal” subject; (3) that women must be slim and “beautiful”; (4) that feminine sexuality is passive defined by men. (32)

Feminist approaches also suggest that women's body dissatisfaction comes from social pressure put on women to strive for the slender, toned body shape associated with youth, control and success, further encouraging the objectification of the body and disproportionate allocations of energies to body maintenance and body image (Grogan 57). Susie Orbach argues that women are taught from an early age to view their bodies as commodities, and that the way women's bodies are used to sell products in Western consumer culture, and the fact that women's bodies themselves are objectified creates body image problems for women:

The receptivity that women show (across class, ethnicity, and through the generations) to the idea that their bodies are like gardens—arenas for constant improvement and re-sculpting—is rooted in the recognition of their bodies as commodities. A consumer society in which women’s bodies perform the crucial function of humanizing other products while being presented as the ultimate commodity creates all sorts of body image problems for women, both at the level of distortion about their own and others’ bodies, and in creating a disjuncture from their bodies. (17)

Other feminist researchers see women as victims of a society that controls them through their bodies, with unrealistic ideals as an ideal way to keep women in a subordinate position, ensuring that they put their energies into vigilance over their bodies (Grogan 53). Susan Brownmiller takes a critical look at the importance of body size in relation cultural expectations for women, noting that masculinity is tied to concepts of “powerful” and “large,” whereas femininity is linked to “small” and “weak,” arguing that pressure on women to be slight and small is driven by men’s desire to dominate:

When a woman stands taller than a man she has broken a cardinal feminine rule, for her physical stature reminds him that he may be too short—inadequate, insufficient—for the competitive world of men. She has dealt a blow to his masculine image, undermined his footing as aggressor-protector. (13-14)

These associations of femaleness with smallness are firmly embedded in our consciousness, and lead to discomfort when challenged; particularly since women’s bodies typically carry ten percent more fatty tissue than men’s, women’s bodies have been controlled and restricted across civilizations, with practices that serve to weaken women physically, making them more dependent on men (Grogan 54).

In contrast, Dorothy Smith sees women in taking an active role in interpreting cultural messages, arguing that women “do femininity,” as a skilled activity involving reading appropriate material (especially women’s magazines) where information is actively presented on how to be more attractive (Grogan 55). Sandra Bartky also sees women as actively engaging with the representation of the female body, as a “fashion-beauty” complex seeks to provide women (on the surface) with opportunities to indulge themselves, while covertly depreciating their bodies by presenting messages that women fail to measure up to current ideals:

We are presented everywhere with images of perfect female beauty—at the drugstore cosmetic display, the supermarket magazine counter, on

television. These images remind us constantly that we fail to measure up. The female body is revealed as a task, an object in need of transformation... The fashion-beauty complex produces in women an estrangement from her bodily being: on the one hand, she is it and is scarcely allowed to be anything else; on the other hand, she must exist perpetually at a distance from her physical self, fixed at this distance in a permanent posture of disapproval. (40)

These feminist accounts of women's experience of the body are important in helping to make sense of why women show normative body concern, and gave me a foundation for beginning my interviewing process. I also took into account research that has investigated differences in body dissatisfaction and image along age, race and social class lines. Some have suggested that adolescence is the time when body image concern is at its peak in young women, due to physical changes in shape as girls may be moving away from a slender goal or ideal; others have suggested that social pressures to be slim and attractive impact women of all ages (Grogan 131).

Studies on ethnic differences in body dissatisfaction have shown that in ethnic groups where being overweight is not stigmatized, healthier, more satisfied attitudes towards larger body shape and size may develop, with meaning ascribed to images of thinness and fatness varying between white and non-white ethnic groups (Grogan 135). Furthermore, current data suggest that whites (especially white women) are more at risk of "feeling fat," and are more likely to diet, than are African-American, Asian-American or Hispanic groups, although there is evidence that the disparity may be disappearing (137).

Sarah Grogan has found that researchers who have compared body satisfaction across different social class groups have produced mixed results (137). One study comparing 846 girls aged eleven to eighteen of different socio-economic backgrounds found higher levels of weight concern in girls from schools catering for higher social class backgrounds; other work with women of differing social classes has also found that those in the higher social class bands are more dissatisfied with their bodies (137). However, other studies have failed to find social class differences in body dissatisfaction, which has led to suggestions that pressures to be thin are spreading beyond the upper and middle classes (138).

In this particular study, I wanted to explore how body image is socially constructed, and how the environment on "the hill," including the students and other specificities, like the "caf," and ideas of a "typical Ole," influence women's seemingly prevalent problems with their body image. Steve O'Neill mentioned a distinction that exists between St. Olaf and other academic institutions, such as state schools or community colleges, saying that this particular school and its level of academic rigorousness fits with higher levels

of eating disorders and body image problems, adding: “It makes sense. A common characteristic of the St Olaf student is that they are perfectionistic, driven.” This research aims at exploring how such factors play into body image, how body image may change during one’s time spent here, and what direction research such as this ought to take in the future.

Methodology

In this study, I wanted to hear from female students as to how they experience body image and its surrounding issues at St Olaf. I chose to focus only on women, with whom most body image difficulties seem to occur (which is certainly not to say that men do not think or worry about their bodies). I spoke only with upper-class students, whom I felt would be the most articulate about their experiences, and who have spent the longest time living on the campus of St Olaf. Therefore, I interviewed nine senior women and one junior woman, with the hopes of uncovering the stories, experiences, complaints and thoughts they had about their body image, how it changes and how it is affected by the community at St Olaf.

I contacted most of my subjects by email to ask if they would be willing to participate in a research study on body image and women at St Olaf, and to set up a convenient interview time. Most of the subjects were acquaintances of mine, either from class or otherwise. All were briefed as to the subject matter of the research, were informed of any rewards or consequences of participating in the study, and all signed a consent form ensuring their confidentiality (all names used here have been changed) . Over a period of four weeks, from the end of March until mid-April, I conducted ten interviews, all approximately one hour in length; the majority of these took place in the vicinity of Buntrock Commons.

I decided to focus mainly on gathering information through a semi-structured interview format; drawing on a base set of questions, each interview followed the same general procedure, although the conversation stemmed in large part from the responses each interviewee gave . I tried to allow the participants to guide the interview, and to not lead them to give certain responses, or taint their ideas on this topic with my own.

The ability to generalize is not one of the strengths of this methodology; its strength lies instead in obtaining a broad range of perceptions and ideas, comments and experiences that may not fit neatly into categories but are valid precisely because they aim to encapsulate the depth of experiences. Weaknesses in this type of qualitative data collection revolve around the lack of generalizable results that are applicable to large social groups; although I think my findings are important and say a lot about body image issues in general and about life at St Olaf for female students

specifically, these findings do not apply either to other colleges, to males, or perhaps even to other female students (say, younger) that attend St Olaf. But my interviews, discussions and conversations with these women and many others over the span of this year have been fruitful specifically because they have been open-ended and qualitative.

Findings

After gathering up all of the data provided by the participants, I was a little overwhelmed at reading through all of the information, attempting to organize it. What follows has been broken down into first a discussion of the term “body image,” followed by a glimpse at how it is socially constructed. Next, I examine the environment at St Olaf, how living in a land of “golden girls” affects the development of body image for students here, as well as the differences noticeable when one steps off “the hill.” Finally, I examine some ideas of what has and should be done about the situation of body dissatisfaction, before concluding with further questions and ideas.

What is Body Image?

Since the 1950s, researchers have taken “body image” to mean many different things, including the perception of one’s own body attractiveness, body size distortion, perception of body boundaries, and the accuracy of perception of bodily sensations (Grogan 1). The young women I interviewed reflected similar ideas of body image, giving definitions such as Carmen, who described body image as “how someone sees their body—and it can be realistic or unrealistic,” a definition like that of Lindsay: “How a person views their own body, whether it be positive or negative.” Kendra suggested that body image is “how you perceive your body. It’s something that changes, something that really affects you—like the way you eat, dress, and interact with others.” A few others recognized body image as having to do only with the physical body, however, Andrea instead defined body image as “the way a person perceives the physical, emotional and spiritual body—it’s not just about the way you look.” In my research, the definition I find to be the best is: A person’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings about his or her body, as this includes body size estimation, evaluation of attractiveness, and emotions associated with body size and shape (Ibid).

Although every student I spoke with seemed to perceive both a prevalence of eating disorders on campus, and that body image and dissatisfaction are definite issues at St. Olaf, almost all gave descriptions of their own body image that seemed relatively healthy:

“My body image has always been pretty good--- I’ve always seen my body as beneficial, and I’ve never tried to lose weight or anything.” (Laura)

“I don’t know what average is, but I’d say mine is pretty positive, I don’t diet a lot or anything... but it’s really hard to keep a positive body image if all the people around you are feeling negatively.” (Kendra)

“There are a lot of things about my body that I don’t like, that I’ve had to come to terms with. But overall I’m ok, enough to keep eating, which I think is important.” (Joy)

“I would say my body image is relatively realistic—I would always rather be thinner—but it’s not negative, but not really positive, either.” (Carmen)

“I’ve always been really confident about my body, but it’s a challenge here, especially because there is so much stress to be thin to be beautiful, which is something I’ll never be.” (Lindsay)

These women seemed pretty comfortable with their bodies. Are they all so well-rounded and reasonable that they managed to escape the cult of thinness so many fall prey to? In talking with these women, I hoped to get a sense of how their (seemingly positive) body image has developed, how it has changed over time, and how they view the development and direction of this problem of widespread body dissatisfaction, both at St Olaf and in the society as a whole.

The Social Construction of Body Image

Body image may be seen as a psychological phenomenon significantly affected by social factors. To understand it fully, Susan Grogan suggests that we need to look not only at the experiences of individuals in relation to their bodies, but also at the cultural milieu in which the individual operates, for the image an individual has of her body is largely determined by social experience, and is elastic, open and changing with new information (2-3). She adds:

Media imagery may be particularly important in producing changes in the ways that the body is perceived and evaluated, depending on the viewer’s perception of the importance of those cues. It is likely that some viewers are more sensitive to such cues than others. Other groups who attach particular importance to body-related imagery (e.g. people with eating disorders, body-builders) may also be sensitized to media cues. Research has suggested that most people have some reference group that furnishes social information relevant to body image (which may be friends, family or the media). Body image is socially constructed, so it must be investigated and analyzed within its cultural context. (3)

Before delving specifically into environmental and other factors at St Olaf, there are several components that my interviewees described as fundamental influences upon the formation of their body image. All of these, whether particular to college women at St Olaf or not, overlap and intertwine to create

the experiences and feelings that work to socially construct one's body image.

Comments from others and self esteem issues.

"[My body image is definitely affected] if I'm around people who are stressing about their bodies or are talking about it. Also, negative comments from people [affect me]. I still remember a comment from a kid in sixth grade. He told me I was fat and I wasn't, I was just taller, but those things stick with you." (Kendra)

Numerous studies have examined the impact specifically of self-esteem upon body image, most finding a positive relationship between the two. Research by Shanette Harris that is consistent with past studies has suggested that college women's feelings and thoughts about the physical aspects of self are closely linked to other areas of their psychosocial development. Those college women who are satisfied with specific body parts and processes and report favorable feelings toward their appearance also show a clear educational, career, and life purpose as well as a sense of wellness. Unfavorable evaluations of appearance, on the other hand, have important implications for women's willingness to pursue activities, and dissatisfaction with specific body parts may also influence one's perceptions of and attitudes toward physical appearance (1995).

At St Olaf, similar patterns exist. Kendra stated: "For some people at this school, how they look determines how they feel that day. If their hair doesn't look right or their clothes, it'll ruin their day." A lot of the women in my study also specifically mentioned comments from others as having a high impact upon their body attitudes. Andrea added, "It's definitely what people say (that influences my body image)—and it's so much easier to let the bad things stick with you than the good things. I remember my mom saying it looked like I had gained weight — those things stick with you. It's almost like you have to have (compliments) pounded into your head for you to believe them." Carmen also stated: "Compliments definitely influence [my body image], and being in a good mood just makes you feel better about yourself." Others similarly reflected that a mood is important in how they feel about their bodies, such as Sara, who said, "If I'm in a good mood, I don't care so much about what I look like." Angela also added: "Sometimes, if I'm in a good mood, I look at my body and I'm really happy... other times, it's just 'No, no, no.'" Why is it that comments, both positive and negative, can have such lasting effects? What is it about being in a good mood that can be such a helpful factor in a healthy body image? As stated earlier, research has shown that self-esteem and body image are two linked variables, but the evidence does not lend itself to conclusions about whether high self-esteem leads to higher body image, or whether feeling

good about the body leads to higher self-esteem (Grogan 181). Perhaps further research would be helpful in determining the effects on body image of building self-esteem, in the hopes that raising self-esteem may help improve body satisfaction.

Joy also mentioned: “I’m definitely aware if someone makes a comment [about body size], and of what other people say about bodies—even if it’s not about me, and especially coming from males. [My body image] is also affected by the concentration of women all the same age here—we talk about it a lot, and that makes you more in tune.” From my own experience, living in a “pod” with nine other senior women, I can relate to Joy’s sentiments. If my roommate makes a comment about wanting to lose ten pounds, or takes fifteen minutes to find something to wear, constantly scowling at the mirror and complaining about some part of her body, I start to look at my own body negatively, too. Everyone I live with thinks about their body, talks about their body and those of other people (friends and famous people alike), and feels guilty if they don’t work out or if they eat a lot late at night. There is not one girl in my pod with whom I have neither conversed about body image and its related sub-topics, or who has not simply commented about body size, feeling the need to work out or to lose weight. This leads me to question: What is this doing to our relationships with each other? What are we not talking about?

Friends.

“Among my friends, [body image] is a constant topic of conversation. I have one friend who has lost about eighty pounds overall, since freshmen year of college, and whereas before she never dated anyone, now guys are chasing after her—which totally reinforces the idea that ‘if you lose weight, you’ll get a boyfriend’—which is so wrong!”

Unsurprisingly, every student I talked with named their friends as a huge influence, both positive and negative, upon their body images. At a school like St Olaf, where community is seen as very important and the fostering of strong friendships and relationships is a main goal of the residence life staff, one would expect those you are constantly surrounded by to have a large impact on your life, and one would further hope that these influences are helpful in one’s development. It seems that here friends do play a large role in the overall atmosphere of a students’ surroundings, but this can be both positive and negative.

Sara took a positive standpoint on her friendships: “I think friends are a huge influence. I live in a triple, so we definitely talk about [our bodies] a lot, saying all the different things we like about each other. We compliment each other, so

it's not like it's negative for us." Laura, however, sees it both ways: "I think my friends may be the most disgustingly healthy women. Everyone in my house has a healthy body image. But my other good friends live in a different house, which is wrought with eating disorders. Almost half of those girls have or are currently struggling with one. It doesn't affect me that much, but it probably would if I lived with them." Lindsay added similar sentiments of being glad she doesn't live in an atmosphere filled with such problems and comments, saying: "Body image is a huge issue this year in the quint (a small pod in which some of her friends live)—the girls will say, 'I worked out for an hour today,' and someone else will say, 'Well I worked out for three'... I'm just really glad I'm not around for it all." Theresa added, "I don't have a lot of girl friends, and that's precisely why. I don't want to deal with all of those body image issues—I will not talk about body image because nobody wants to do it for real." Theresa seemed frustrated in the lack of discussions about body image that weren't entirely focused on the body; as a member of the Wellness House, she expressed a concern that more effort be made to talk about wellness issues as a whole, not just on the body and food. She said that, ironically, many of the women she knows who are involved in promoting such topics as "Eating Disorders Awareness Week," themselves struggle with disordered eating. She claims people like to talk about body image issues, because they like having those kinds of problems. What does this say about women and their relationship to their bodies? Why might we want to form disordered eating? Roberta Seid, in discussing how a myth of a slender ideal has become an obsession, says that at the core of the equation between health, beauty and energy has been a feminist conception of woman—who had to be active, self-confident, assertive (219). She continues, saying that one reason feminists in the past did not condemn the slender, fit ideal was that they wanted to de-emphasize female sexual characteristics—and in proclamations for equality between the sexes, feminists insisted that biology was not destiny, that there were no inborn differences between males and females (219-20). Furthermore, one of the earliest and most vehement demands had been for women's right to control their own bodies, demands that "meshed perfectly with the cultural demand to be thin and fit. Women did not have to be fat. They could mold their bodies as well as their destinies" (220).

Carmen expressed the idea that body image problems are sometimes not dealt with in an open, honest manner among friends, saying: "On the surface, body image issues are sort of a joke, but I think there are some people in my pod who have really severe issues—I don't address them because I don't know how to deal with them—but the jokes just cover up the fact that there are serious issues." Why might these problems not be dealt with in an open manner? Why isn't serious dialogue about body image problems promoted? I'm reminded of

a conversation I had with a close friend of mine a few days ago; we were gossiping about another friend of ours—and after several minutes we realized how much we talk to each other about our other friends, often negatively. Why might we want to criticize and insult our friends behind their backs? Is it part of our nature to judge, compare and compete with one another? Does it really make us feel better about ourselves? In the same manner, why might women like joking or lightly discussing body image problems, without ever really hitting upon them seriously, to the extent to which they are the reality of our daily lives? I'm left wondering how my relationships with my friends could be improved, not only if we gossiped less, but if we promoted a loving environment, not of competition, but of openness and truth.

Comparison/Competition.

“No matter how thin people are, most people are always thinking they can do better. That's why you see some girls down there (in Tostrud), working out two to three times/day—nobody is really happy with their bodies.”

Many of the women I talked with mentioned that comparing themselves with others, particularly in an atmosphere of competition, is a key influence on their body image. Sharlene Hesse-Biber compared the situation in her study of college women to that of Snow White's stepmother in the famous fairy tale, stating:

Like the stepmother, many women perceive others as more attractive than themselves and feel envy, rage, and even violence toward one another. Good-looking women, regardless of their other attributes, are just more competition for the few Princes out there. My interview subjects reported that they constantly compared themselves to their sisters, mothers, and girlfriends. (74)

My subjects reported similar feelings, such as Joy, who commented: “It's all about competition in America: I feel fine until I see a girl who looks perfect, then I think I should look that way.” Rachel added, “When I started out here, [my body image] used to be more about comparing myself to other people. It didn't click before that I'm taller and a little bigger than other girls, that I can't be 5'5” and really little.” Reba, a size four, reflected: “I think most women here have a negative body image because even I look around and think everyone is skinnier than me, and then I think other people are better proportioned than me, so I still want to look like them, even if they aren't skinnier.”

Others brought up the female to male ratio as important in fostering competition. The St. Olaf student body this year is composed of 1761 full-time

female students, (about sixty percent), and 1212 full-time male students (<http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/irp>). Sara commented: “There are just so many of us—it’s like a 60/40 female to male ratio—so we compete for men, too.” The competition these women feel also may only increase as women get older in college, as men tend to date younger women, and not usually vice-versa. Andrea adds: “There’s more pressure here for women to dress up—guys can roll out of bed and look cute, girls who do that don’t—it kind of reflects traditional women’s roles to look good, that it’s a woman’s role to look good to get a man.” Hesse-Biber agrees:

A woman’s sense of worth in our culture is still greatly determined by her ability to attract a man. Social status is largely a function of income and occupation. Women’s access to these resources is generally indirect, through marriage. Even a woman with a successful and lucrative career may fear that her success comes at the expense of her femininity.” (13-14)

Rachel also mentioned: “There is an underlying competition—especially here; in my first-year dorm there was only one floor of guys, and two floors of girls, so the girls were competing with each other for the guys, and of course you want to be better looking.”

Male Attention.

“The amount of male attention that I get here definitely is a strong influence [on my body image]—which is considerably less than I have gotten anywhere else or at any other time in my life. I really do feel that guys here get programmed to think that 5’4” to 5’6”, blonde and size 6 is what they want—there’s a stigma that “everyone is blonde here...” and it’s really hard being so tall. I can’t fit into that image.”

An “all-important indication that a woman has the culturally correct body image is the attention she gets from men,” which may take the form of getting a date or merely a nice remark concerning her appearance (Hesse-Biber 77). Research has also shown both that women are typically more dissatisfied with their weight than are men, and that those with less satisfying dating situations and sex lives are less satisfied with their overall appearance (Hoyt and Rogers 2000). St Olaf, despite, or perhaps because of, its lack of a typical dating scene, is no exception. Those interviewees who have a boyfriend tended to say he is a very important, and positive, influence upon their body image. Andrea says, “Having a boyfriend really helps, he makes me feel really good about myself, he’s so kind and complimentary. Being in a relationship definitely helps me feel more attractive.” Sara agreed, saying, “Having a

boyfriend who is complimentary really helps—like in hearing comments from him,[saying] that I shouldn't have to work out or something.” It's almost as though Sara feels that having a boyfriend prevents her from feeling the “normal” pressures on a woman—that as long as he says she doesn't need to work out, she doesn't. In that sense, perhaps if the dating scene here was “alive,” women would feel better about themselves, in receiving more positive attention from men.

Those without a boyfriend seemed at the other end of the spectrum. Andrea feels that “there are so many more girls than guys here. I think guys can sort of kick back and be selective. And guys definitely have an influence [because] girls get depressed because they don't have a boyfriend, but there simply aren't enough guys to go around.” Lindsay also surmised: “I don't get much positive reinforcement here—but what is positive reinforcement? Getting hit on by a guy? It's unfortunate that [many people] see it that way.” Why should this be the case? Do women really need men to feel good about themselves? Do men need women to feel good about themselves? And might it also work in the opposite direction—that being in a relationship could put more pressure on a girl (or guy) to look good, to continually satisfy their partner? Perhaps my frustration here is evident. Why does our society in the first place put so much pressure on the way we look? Body weight has been shown to play an important part in physical attraction—in research studies that have asked what attributes are most indicative of “positive appearance,” weight was a key factor (Hesse-Biber 14). But isn't it true that there are a lot of people who do not fit the societal ideal of beauty, who are happy, whether they be in a romantic relationship with someone or not? Perhaps, particularly in the media, examples of these types of people and relationships simply aren't displayed enough (similar to the way those who don't fit the “stereotypical Ole” mold seem invisible here?).

The Media.

“The media is probably the most negative influence for me. You see some skinny skinny blonde girl in tight clothes [on T.V. or in movies] and you think ‘Wow I couldn't wear that.’ It just pushes body image thoughts to the front of your mind.”

In this study I chose neither to ignore nor focus on the media and advertising industry influences on body image. Their role in relation to the portrayal of the male and female body has been debated among social scientists. Most, however, agree that the media reflects current social norms, and some have further suggested that media portrayals of slender body shapes actually do affect the ways that women (and men) feel about their body shape and size

(Grogan 94). Marjorie Ferguson, who used content analysis to study a selection of women's magazines over a span of twenty-five years, as well as through interviews with magazine editors and journalists, concludes:

I have argued that women's magazines collectively comprise a social institution which serves to foster and maintain a cult of femininity. In promoting a cult of femininity these journals are not merely reflecting the female role in society; they are also supplying one source of definitions of, and socialization into, that role. (184)

Ferguson holds that the media does much more than simply reflect current values, that instead women's magazines in particular may change a woman's view of herself by teaching her socially acceptable ways in which to behave. It is important to note that this "cult of femininity" purports that there is a certain way for women to act, a way that is distinct from the way men do—resulting in not only men, but also women, criticizing those women who do make "masculine" advances, which may result in gains of power or status. Women's magazines in particular, with glossy pages of ads and beauty advice, hold up a devious mirror—offering "help" to women, while simultaneously presenting a standard nearly impossible to obtain (Hesse-Biber 32). It seems to be a no-win situation: slender, attractive women are portrayed as both the unattainable goal, and as unintelligent sex objects. Women who achieve power, prestige, and success in a man's world may be seen as unfeminine or too assertive. Hillary Rodham Clinton's evolving image during the 1993 presidential election is a good example: as a graduate of Yale Law School, she was a partner with a prestigious law firm and made more money than her husband. But during the campaign, many were allegedly "put off by her assertiveness," so strategists softened her image to portray her as the "woman behind the man." Hillary began appearing more with her child, and followed advice on her clothes, hair and overall appearance. As Hesse-Biber concludes: "Even women who have direct access to high social status do not escape more mundane interpretations of attractiveness and femininity." (14).

The media's influence at St. Olaf was perceived differently among my interviewees, some seeing it as having a large impact, others not. Lindsay, reflecting the lack of time for many to watch T.V. (and cable is relatively hard to find) said: "I think the media is less of an influence here. It's more that I need to look like the girl in my immunology class, rather than a model. I'm too busy to be absorbed with media influences." Her comment reflects the underlying conviction of competition, of never measuring up to high standards of attractiveness, femininity. No matter if the media is a persistent and prevalent influence in a woman's life here (or anywhere?), the oppressing

societal patterns which teach woman that they must control their bodies remains inescapable.

Living in a Land of Golden Girls

This section will examine the St Olaf environment, from the impact of “the caf,” and the stereotypical “Ole,” to first-year fears and the maturation process that occurs in the years spent on this hill.

Stepping onto the St Olaf campus for Week One orientation as a first-year is overwhelming in itself, particularly for those who may have never lived away from home. Many may not know anyone else attending this school or at least not any close friends, and the added freedoms and responsibilities that come with college life are all factors that combine to create quite the anxious situation. With current estimates at five to twenty percent of female college students suffering from an eating disorder, the issue of what puts college-aged students, particularly women, at an increased risk definitely appears to be something that deserves attention. It seems evident that college students cannot escape larger societal pressures for thinness, and in many cases may seem more susceptible to them. Lesley White of the Massachusetts Eating Disorder Association adds:

From the campus gym to the dorm, the quest for thinness is as pervasive as it is in the real world... The obvious danger to these kinds of norms on college campuses is that, at a time when an individual is struggling to separate from home and find her own niche at school, he or she may use the quest for thinness and attractiveness as his/her only mode of acceptance. The college atmosphere may be one in which dangerous behaviors such as self-starvation, repetitive bingeing and compulsive over-exercising may not only be overlooked, but also encouraged. It is not uncommon that once one individual on a floor or in a dorm develops an eating disorder, similar symptoms and behaviors increase throughout the living community. (World College Health Website)

Sharlene Hesse-Biber also describes several factors that make the college environment a breeding ground for weight obsession, including the fact that colleges tend to be middle- and upper-middle-class enclaves, “a group that places a high premium on thinness in women,” as well as that college is a “semi-closed” environment that tends to amplify socio-cultural pressures, and the importance of physical appearance in dating, as: “Students who live in close quarters often feel pressured to live up to group standards of beauty” (90). Other components of the college environment include widespread myths about gaining the “Freshman Fifteen,” (although most fail to realize that slight weight gain is normal and a necessary part of their adult growth), as well as the changeover from regimented meals at home to the buffet-style “all you can eat”

at a cafeteria like Stav hall, which is difficult to manage for some, as each negotiates their relationship with food.

The Caf

“The caf is a terrible place. People are constantly comparing what[food] you’ve got, to see if you have enough or more than them. I hate eating with all these people who are constantly talking about [body image issues].” (Theresa)

Stav Hall is the only cafeteria on campus; with six different food lines that offer on a daily basis everything from Mexican to Vegan options, along with a salad bar, fruit bar, soup options, a dozen varieties of cereal and a host of desserts, there is clearly never a lack in the food supply. However, eating with your peers everyday creates obvious problems. Andrea says, “I think of how good our food here is, how easy it is to overeat—which it can make people panicky. I think people feel pressure to not put as much on their tray—I even heard that they starch the lettuce here so that people will get enough vitamins.”

The caf reflects larger components of body image, fostering much comparison between students, as Angela notes: “The caf is part of that whole Olaf comparison thing, people are constantly looking at others, to see what they’re eating and what they look like. I know I’m not alone when I see a really skinny girl and I immediately look to see what’s on her tray, and a lot of times it’s just fruit.” Steve O’Neill also spoke of the caf, saying that he has had many conversations with female students about how difficult it is to eat there: “Many times nothing is actually said [at the caf], but lots of comparisons occur just in girls’ heads—thinking ‘How much am I eating compared to them?’—and things get really distorted, particularly for those students who do have an eating disorder. A competition seems to exist between them, with each [girl] thinking ‘I’m going to eat less than you.’” Lindsay adds: “I think it’s harder [for] people who do have an eating disorder [to eat in the caf]. Someone will say something if a girl looks like she’s got an eating problem, so it can help, but it can also [not help], because we are constantly comparing, noticing.”

What is also interesting to note is the conflicting ideal of food, as reward, something to enjoy, and conversely, as something to feel guilty and ashamed about. Roberta Seid notes that:

In the fifties and sixties Americans had both rejoiced and worried about their culinary abundance, and their primary concern had been how to enjoy this bounty and yet keep the calorie count down... In the late sixties and early seventies, convenience chains were multiplying by twenty-six percent a year... food production itself kept shifting away from small, family-based farms to enormous agribusiness corporations. The traditional, home-cooked meal,

began to seem like a ghost of the past... stripped of traditional culinary rituals and associations, eating could become—or viewed as—a bad habit that had to be broken. (185-7)

What aggravates the situation further at St. Olaf is the public environment of Stav Hall, as opposed to the private domain of meals eaten at home. If food is indeed something to feel ashamed about, women here must do it in front of their peers. And if not eating is viewed as a necessary challenge, the competition is fierce.

The “Typical Ole”

“I look at some women, and it’s clear they are trying to live up to a standard—to fit into a uniform type—the “typical Ole,” who wears tight, low cut jeans, with midriff showing and blow-dried hair that’s curled at the ends, but that’s the cynical view...” (Theresa)

Nearly everyone I spoke to reported a similar, cynical take on a standard they feel they need to look up to, a perfect-looking “typical Ole.” As Sara said, “Everyone here is just so perfect all the time. Their hair is done, blow-dried, gelled, curled, makeup on. It’s just like a fashion show everywhere you go.” Carmen agreed: “Everyone here wants to be skinny, cute, even their clothes are similar... cute and perky. I keep thinking of J-crew models.” Andrea added, “I think you get sucked into believing there’s a standard when you first come here, and it sort of becomes a standard because of that.” Angela also commented, “Of course the joke here is that everyone is blonde-haired and blue-eyed—and especially when you aren’t anywhere near that idea, you notice it. People try and fit in as much as they can.”

A few other women mentioned how the “type” of student who comes here also affects the standard women feel they need to follow. Carmen added, “Here Olaf attracts the type of person who cares about how they look. If people aren’t like that when they come here, they’re socialized to be that way. Everyone needs to fit in, and be a part of that group.” Apparently this may involve not only dressing alike and maintaining a certain level of appearance, but also ignoring those who may not fit into the standard, the invisible non-blonde, blue-eyed, or slender people, as well as the diversity St. Olaf continually strives to achieve.

Lindsay also stated, “St Olaf attracts and breeds perfectionists. Some of the girls that people think are perfect are probably really miserable, though. There’s one girl in a class of mine, she always looks perfect, studies hard, works out three hours/day—and that is the standard [women] here feel they have to look up to, and yet she’s really miserable.” Perhaps that is key:

the difference between ideology and reality—that even for those women who do fit into the societal model, who follow and portray the societal prescription of femininity—happiness and success are not automatic rewards. For not only do these women face the wrath of their peers' dirty looks and jealous sneers, they feel a constant pressure to maintain their appearance of perfection, at whatever cost that may take. Considering the price of clothing, makeup and other “necessities” for looking good, a connection to the capitalist market again comes into play.

Hierarchy of needs.

“What are our main stresses here? Good grades and looking good. No one here worries about how they’re going to get their next meal or how they’ll feed their kids. Everyone here is completely self-absorbed.” (Lindsay)

Perhaps it seems ironic that a Lutheran-affiliated school, which aims to develop (and does, depending on how you measure it) service-oriented individuals, aware of global perspectives and committed to the betterment of society, could also foster what some describe as a selfish problem. As Kendra said, “It does seem selfish, worrying about something that shouldn’t matter, when there are so many other more important things to worry about.” Theresa also commented, “I had a friend whose eating took over her life, and it made me so pissed because she couldn’t do anything but obsess about your body—which is so selfish and superficial. It makes you ruin other talents that you have when there is so much more to worry about than eating habits and what you look like.” Susan Brownmiller agrees, and says that because appearance, not accomplishment, is the feminine demonstration of desirability and worth, a woman is never free of self-consciousness. She adds: “[Women are] never quite satisfied, and never secure, for desperate, unending absorption in the drive for a perfect appearance—call it feminine vanity—is the ultimate restriction on the freedom of mind” (51).

Maybe it makes sense. Many other factors that lead to body dissatisfaction have been discussed, including the constant comparisons and feelings of competition amongst women all nearly the same age and from similar social class backgrounds, with similar drives to succeed. Unless a student has family problems or financial pressures, the campus community is stable—and with unending meals at the caf, nightly musical events, weekend activities and movies, lectures, and chapel talks, real-world concerns are a far-cry from St. Olaf. Add to the mix Joy’s sentiments that: “Here, we’re only thinking about ourselves, as opposed to motherhood or something, when there will be more time pressures, more thinking about your kids or your husband,” and perhaps you’ve got, in part, a recipe for body image problems. When you have nothing else to worry

about but yourself, when you are surrounded by other women your age, all young with seemingly close-to-ideal bodies, with the money to buy nice clothes and make-up, with the time to devote to working-out and looking good, and when you all eat in the same place, sleep in the same dorms and compete for the same men, all in the wider social context of feminine competition, oppression and objectification, what ought we expect?

“We are all the same.”

“Here we all sort of look the same. I work at Blue Mondays (a coffee-shop in Northfield), and there we never talk about this stuff., So many different types of people come in, [such as]Carleton students,[and] people from town, and I love it! You start seeing all these wonderful, different types of bodies. Here we are all the same, Caucasian, etc. And we try to stand out, but we also try to be the same.” (Theresa)

More than just that students here tend to look the same, many in my study also spoke of the St. Olaf image, of the perfectionist student it attracts, and of the prevalence of students who come from the middle and upper classes. Social theorists have suggested that social class relates to the ways in which the body is conceptualized, with dominant classes placing more time and emphasis on aesthetic (rather than functional) dimensions of the body (Grogan 142). A premium is placed on looking good, and “in a society where beauty and charm still strongly affect a woman’s social, marital, and economic success, fat women risk downward social mobility” (Hesse-Biber 61). Furthermore, attractive people are viewed as “happier, more successful, smarter, more interesting, warmer, more poised and more sociable” (Hesse-Biber 59). Appearance matters, particularly for the upper classes.

These trends are reflected in the comments given by my participants, including Rachel, who said, “I’ve worked at the U [University of Minnesota], which is more diverse, with people from a wider background. Olaf draws mainly upper/middle class people, who seem to be more concerned about their body image in general.” She added: “There is a lot of pressure here to be the best—it’s like taking all those perfectionists from all the high schools in Minnesota, and putting them all in one area.” Kendra agreed: “I think a lot of girls struggle with their body image—you see girls working out for hours—especially because so many are coming from the upper/middle classes, where eating disorders have been the most problematic. I’d say a lot of people are perfectionists, they have to be in control, and their weight is one area they can control.” The modern woman achieves the thin ideal through self-controlled action, like dieting and exercise—which tie into the modern, capitalistic realms of the diet, beauty, cosmetic, fitness and health industries (Hesse-Biber

26). Furthermore, such direction of time and energy toward self-control also divert economic and emotional capital away from other investments women might take, like political activism or careers.

Sara mentioned both the number of perfectionists and its relation to the so-called “St. Olaf Image” by saying, “It’s the mentality here. I remember a tenth grade study that showed I am an overachiever, perfectionist—and those are the qualities that Olaf breeds. The perspective students come and see everyone looks so perfect. You think ‘Oh I want to be a part of that group,’ so this school attracts the type of people who want that.” Andrea also brought up the image of the school, offering that, “I do think people here are more concerned with it, maybe think they need to fit in with the Olaf image. When you come here, you realize what the image is, and you either like it, or you are totally turned off by it.” Where does this image come from, and whom does it benefit? are two important questions to consider. Although I think the college itself plays a definite role in maintaining a prestigious, almost perfect image (I think again of those smiling students on the college web-page), this image is also maintained by the students themselves. Perhaps we like thinking of ourselves as perfectionists and over-achievers, as perfect-looking models of the middle and upper classes. And perhaps that is what Theresa was hinting at when she said we try to stand out, and be the same, at the same time. However much we claim to not like the “image” of St. Olaf, and that of the “typical Ole,” a part of us may still strive to look like that “J-crew” model we pass everyday in the caf. As Andrea stated earlier, when you start believing there is a standard, that is when it is further maintained—so if you think everyone here looks the same, and looks perfect all the time to boot, and you start to feel the need to dress and act similarly, that is when the stereotype proliferates. Lindsay adds: “There are hardly any overweight people here, and very few obese people. So the demographics are very different than elsewhere. A much higher percentage of the population here has an ideal body than in the real world... Maybe it’s because we’re all so similar [that there is such a push to be thin]. It’s very much not like the real world here, and I can’t wait to get out of this atmosphere in that sense.” But the difference between what actually exists, and what people think exists, is important—and perhaps some students come to realize that as they grow older.

First-year Fears

“In high school I never really cared about how I looked, but when I came here, my awareness of my body totally shot up, my awareness of how I look totally changed... because appearance is so important here.” (Carmen)

Many of the women in my study noted a definite change in their thoughts and

worries about their bodies after arriving at college. Lindsay said: “Before I came to Olaf, I had a much more positive body image. I guess I didn’t think about it as much before...but there is so much pressure to be thin here.” Angela also commented: “In high school I was really little, and everyone always talked about the Freshman 15, and I really didn’t want to gain it.”

The subjects in my study seemed to think the pressures to be thin are the worst in your first-year on campus. Theresa stated, “First-year dorms are the worst. You think, ‘I have to work out, too, if they’re working out.’ No wonder I wanted to transfer after freshman year!” Kendra also commented, “It’s especially evident with the first-years, you can see such a difference compared with the upper-class students... I think it’s because the first-years are just meeting lots of new people, and you want to look good because you think that helps. But once you establish friendships, you don’t care as much about the way you look.” These comments comply with earlier sentiments of competition amongst women, and along with societal pressures to be thin, and on-campus “standards” of appearance is the idea that you need to look good to make friends. Rachel added: “As a freshman, I was really insecure. I was relying more on what other people thought, what groups I was involved in, but now I feel a lot more confident, I am a lot more independent.” Andrea also reflected upon the first-year pressure to look good, and how it has changed in the years since: “Freshmen year, everyone was made up all the time, took hours to get ready before a party or even class—but it’s changed now. In my senior seminar the other day I realized that I was the only one wearing makeup.”

The Maturation Process.

“When you get to your junior and senior year here, you see that there are a lot more normal looking people here. It’s a maturation process, as you learn more about the world, much larger issues. Freshmen and sophomore years, there was so much talk about weight, I got really sick of it. But I don’t hear about it so much anymore.” (Andrea)

Perhaps here there is a glimmer of hope: in speaking only with upper-class students, all were able to reflect upon their years here, and nearly all spoke of a learning process, a positive change with respect to their body image. Carmen said: “I think it does get better. When you’re a freshman it’s hyper-crazy, so there is a huge change from first to senior year; it’s all a matter of becoming more comfortable with yourself, you grow into yourself and the person you want to be. But the issues are definitely still there [when you’re a senior], just not as much as freshman year.”

Laura added: “These four years are so formative in a person’s life. You

grow up so much, accepting/growing into who you are, being able to discern others' thoughts about you, the world, anything, not accepting anything as gospel but as opinions. Other things become not as important, as you get older, more mature, you think more about the world and your place in it." Perhaps as women spend more time at college, and realize there is more to life than looking good, they start to develop the critical attitudes so necessary in recognizing the "tyranny of slenderness" for what it is—an oppressive prescription of consuming desires, needs, complaints and fears that may indeed be overcome.

Off The Hill

Particularly effective in developing one's sense of self is the time spent away from the campus of St. Olaf. Whether in Australia, India, the Middle East, or as close as the University of Minnesota (in nearby Minneapolis), all of my subjects reflected upon the differences between St. Olaf and other campuses near and far, and upon the effects of these experiences while off "the hill."

Other College Campuses

"There's a big difference. At Olaf, you see painfully tiny people—I have a fair amount of friends here that do have eating disorders, and it's so much more apparent here than at any of the other colleges I've visited." (Laura)

Sentiments about "feeling a lot prettier when I leave campus," or that "it's hard to feel attractive here," were heard commonly in my interviews. This seems to fit with the feelings that there is a standard, a stereotype, of perfection that many feel is hard to live up to. One even mentioned a rumor that Playboy Magazine has listed St Olaf in its top five best-looking college campuses over the last three years, although, according to the illustrious magazines' website, the rumor is just that. Nevertheless, all of my subjects noticed a definite difference in standards of appearance between St Olaf and other colleges. Kendra says: "You definitely don't see as many skinny girls [on other college campuses]. It's just not as central to their thinking. It [goes] back to the perfectionists this school attracts." Sara echoed: "In January, I was visiting other grad schools, and people at other places definitely don't look as good. The girls here are really pretty, always done up, and it doesn't bother me so much when I'm here. But when I went to other schools it was like 'Oh my God, I'm the most attractive person in the room,' because at other schools they just don't care as much about the way they look. The competition among girls isn't as fierce."

A few also reflected upon the difference between St Olaf, a relatively small private school, and larger state schools. Carmen stated, "Olaf could be

different than other schools. State schools have a lot of different people of different sizes.” Andrea similarly noted: “At UMD, all of my girlfriends are ‘normal’ sized—definitely when you’re at state schools you see more “normal” sized women. [But] look at Carleton—you definitely don’t have to be an elite school to attract this [standard of appearance].” Where might this “standard” of appearance come from? It seems there may be a connection between schools similar to St. Olaf, in size and academic rigorousness—between the incidence of eating disorders and the “type” of student the school attracts, as Steve O’Neill mentioned earlier. He has found similar existing patterns and behaviors of eating disorders, as well as disordered eating, from meetings with counselors from schools like Luther or Macalester. Andrea mentioned, however, that Carleton, also a small college, which is perhaps even more academically challenging than St. Olaf, does not have the same standard of appearance for its’ student body. Carleton, though, differs in several distinct ways from its cross-town rival: not religiously affiliated and known as more liberal (the wet-campus alcohol policy, unlike St Olaf, is one example), over twice the percent, around sixteen (as compared to six percent at St. Olaf), of its’ 1800 students are minorities (<http://www.stolaf.edu/offices/irp>). If there is a standard of appearance here, it may have more to do with the background and make-up of the student body— young, predominantly white, middle to upper class students who seem to have the money to look good and dress well, and who have the desire to “fit in” with others like themselves.

Traveling Abroad

“My term in the Middle East really influenced me, like when we were in Morocco. It’s not considered beautiful to be thin, and the women there are so gorgeous, big, healthy, curvy, glorious, dark, womanly. And then straight from there we ended up in Paris, and I can’t remember seeing a single woman there that I thought was beautiful. I remember thinking they all looked like ghosts.” (Theresa)

St Olaf prides itself on being a nationwide leader in sending the largest percentage of students off-campus during their four years here—with between fifty and sixty-four percent of recent graduates having studied abroad (nearly 700 each year). Accordingly, eight of my ten subjects reported having been strongly affected by their experiences in other regions of the world. Some noted that going abroad really helped to improve their body image, whereas others reflected upon the challenges of returning to campus after spending so much time elsewhere. Carmen said: “I seriously had less issues with body image while I was on Global (a semester spent traveling across the world) than when I got back on campus, [even though] I gained a lot of weight while on

Global. It didn't matter what people thought then, but when you come back here, it's back to superficial, surface-level interactions." Angela reflected: "On campus, you're not going to see that the average American woman is really a size fourteen. But you go abroad, you see people that are normal. Even though going abroad is where I gained weight, and I really didn't like that, we were hiking and in the ocean and we got hit on SO MUCH. It kind sucks that you have to get that sort of attention from guys to feel that way, but when I got back, I was uncomfortable. When you're abroad, you're away from pressures here, and you're having fun, so who cares?" Here again is a lurking influence of men and their desires, another sense of how a woman's worth in our culture is still determined by her ability to attract a man. Whereas our culture judges a man primarily in terms of how powerful, ambitious, aggressive and dominant he is, a woman is judged almost entirely in terms of her appearance, and her attractiveness to men (Hesse-Biber 17). As Angela said, "getting hit on" by guys is what it sometimes takes to make her feel attractive, comfortable with her body.

In her quote above, Theresa mentioned that she felt the women in Paris looked like ghosts—pale, gaunt, withdrawn—and ruminated on how it is that society has come to a place where such extreme thinness is attractive. She asks, "How did we get to this point? Where we see a size 0, gauntness, as beautiful? [It seems] so un-instinctual. Those women don't look healthy, don't look like good mothers, good sexual partners, etc." Certainly historical changes in body shape "fashions" in the Western world have had a large impact on body shape ideals, with the idealization of slenderness in women the product of an historical evolution that has occurred over the past century (Grogan 13).

Plumpness was considered fashionable and erotic until relatively recently. From the Middle Ages the "reproductive figure" was idealized by artists. The fullness of the stomach was emphasized as a symbol of fertility, and the female body was frequently represented with full, rounded hips and breasts...The idealization of slimness in women is a very recent phenomenon, dating from the 1920s. It is often argued that the thin ideal is the outcome of successful marketing by the fashion industry, which has become the standard of cultural beauty in the industrialized affluent societies of the twentieth century. (Grogan 13-14)

Furthermore, the trend for thinness as a standard of beauty has only become more marked, as Sarah Grogan notes: "In the 1980s, models were slim and looked physically fit, with lithe, toned bodies. But the 1990s have seen a departure from this trend with the emergence of "waif" models who have very thin body types, perhaps the most famous of these being Kate Moss"

(15). Although few researchers have considered body image in non-Western cultures, work that has been reported indicates significant cultural differences in the meanings associated with thinness and plumpness. In poorer cultures, thinness is often seen as a sign of malnutrition, poverty and infectious disease, and increased weight may be viewed positively, as an indication of health, wealth and prosperity (Grogan 19). Laura similarly discussed this recognition of different priorities: "I went to India, and it's not necessarily the reverse there, because women our age there do want to be skinny, but the older women yelled at us for being too skinny, because there it is associated with being poor. [This] is not anything our country will subscribe itself to, but it can help us to realize there are different perspectives out there."

What is a feminist take on this? Wendy Chapkis argues that women are oppressed by a "global culture machine" (made up of the advertising industry, communications media, and the cosmetic industry) which promotes a narrow, Westernized ideal of beauty to women all over the world (42-3). On a more positive note, although she believes women are entrapped in this beauty system, she also believes that there are possibilities for change if women are willing to accept themselves and their bodies as they really are. This would involve examining our "beauty secrets" (rituals that most women undertake to try to conform to the cultural ideal), and rejecting them to celebrate the "natural" body (174-5).

Where do we go from here?

What has been done.

Available for students on campus are a variety of services and centers, programs to increase awareness and to help those who may be struggling. Included are the Counseling Center, Health Services, as well as the Wellness Center and Wellness House, which have worked together this year, and through monthly peer education talks and programs such as "Eating Disorders Awareness Week," have worked to promote healthier lifestyles. Other honor houses, such as WomanSafe, which works to promote a healthier environment for women (such as through support groups for those who have been abused), and the Project P.U.L.S.E. house that promotes heart health, are also campus resources working for a healthier, happier student body. However, opinions about what has been done and the way body image and dissatisfaction issues on campus are treated were mixed. Kendra offered: "I think the issue is handled pretty well. [It] will always be there, and there will always be the problem of getting people to admit it. We could have more meetings, but not a lot of people want to admit it or let people know [they have a problem]." Lindsay said: "There is a lot of effort on this campus, because of the way our body image is. [There are] a lot of women in sports, and eating

disorders are an enemy to sports, lots of awareness committees, support groups.” Laura, on the other hand, stated: “I’ve never seen it treated with a forum or anything, never seen a supportive group, and it seems like enough people here suffer from it. It seems like there should be more dialogue since it is such a problem...” Sara agreed: “I don’t think the whole issue is addressed very much—I mean there was that thing over by the library [a display as part of eating disorders awareness week]—but it was only a week-long event. The posters only stay up until the janitor takes them down, so it’s like it’s not really addressed. It’s just another platform, another cause that people forget about.”

What should be done.

Perhaps it seems obvious that more could be done about these issues of body image and dissatisfaction, particularly if it is a prevalent one on campus, and perhaps also the emphasis needs to shift from being an individual problem, to a community problem, or from something that is entirely about the physical body, to a perspective that includes all aspects of a person’s being. Theresa suggests: “People need to stop talking about the body so much, and talk more instead about wellness, about spiritual aspects, about sleeping enough, being less stressed. We need to stop being obsessed with the body in activities on this campus.” Carmen reflected similar sentiments: “There is so much emphasis on bodies and body image. I see it getting worse. There is this idea that [women] can do what they want, but you can’t have it both ways. Ideals have to conflict in this society. You can try to do what you want, but you’ve got to look a certain way. It’s about trying to change paradigms, and change takes a long time and a lot of effort.” Carmen spoke with reluctance of the term “girl power,” arguing that girls are feeling the pressures to become women at younger and younger ages now, and are being told on one hand that there shouldn’t be any limitations on their aspirations, that they can do what they want (e.g.: become a doctor, lawyer), but at the same time, girls are taught that if they want to be successful, pretty and happy (like the girls on T.V. or in magazines), they need to look a certain way, namely thin. Angela offered similar pessimism: “At Olaf, I don’t think things will ever change, unless it happened on a much bigger level, like we redefined what people think is beautiful,” as did Lindsay: “How do you change the attitudes of so many people? How can you convince people that all bodies are beautiful?”

Summary and Conclusions

Truthfully speaking, my outlook on body image and dissatisfaction is not positive. As many of the women in my study reflected upon, there are larger issues and paradigms that our society seems to stress, which will be hard to change. Sharlene Hesse-Biber asks:

Why are women who have gained some economic independence still expressing their self-reliance and inner control through body rituals? For many women, feeling fat means feeling powerless. However, by investing time, money, and energy on attaining a thin body, women may be substituting a momentary sense of power for “real authority.” The fact remains that regardless of their economic worth, women are socialized to rely on their “natural” resources—beauty, charm, nurturance—to attract the opposite sex. The stakes of physical attractiveness for women are high, since appearance, including body weight, affects social success. (29)

The current definition of what is beautiful, namely that being thin is beautiful and even powerful, is something that must be questioned. Of course this is nothing new.

I was unsurprised to hear of the widespread recognition by my subjects of a female student population that is highly concerned and dissatisfied with their bodies. Like Renee, director of the Wellness Center, I find it disappointing that so many bright young women are unable to overlook their minor bodily imperfections within the scope of the larger world. But as an inhabitant of this hill, often described as a bubble, I can also speak knowingly of the frustrations that come from being a woman and feeling pressures from your peers, from the media, and from society at large to fit into a certain mold. I know and live the contradictions as one of these young women, idyllic in my hopes for the future and a world traveler aware, to a certain extent, of larger issues, I am also all too familiar with the daily struggles of the college female with her body.

The participants in my study not only reflected these struggles—indeed the quotations used here are proof not only that body dissatisfaction exists, but that it is an issue these women deal with, think about and confront often—but they also expanded upon the ways in which body image is socially constructed, through such factors as self-esteem, comments of others, friends, an atmosphere of competition, as well as the media and male attention. Furthermore, the environment of St. Olaf was examined, including specifically the caf and the difficulties and comparisons that occur while eating there, as well as the presumed “typical Ole,” a blonde and perfect-looking perfectionist student who sets the standard for all.

What seems important to note here is the difference between what people perceive and what actually exists on campus. Several subjects made mention of mythical facts—from the rumor that St Olaf has the worst rate of eating disorders of any campus, to the idea that the lettuce here is starched, or that Playboy rates this college within its’ top five “hottest” campuses, as well as the initial perceived invisibility of students who don’t fit the “typical”

profile. These perceptions, as opposed to the reality, of the composition of the student body, and the supposed standard of appearance necessary to fit in, seem particularly important in the development not only of students' body images, but also in the overall perseverance of the image of the college as a whole.

Other factors of the St Olaf environment include the perceived lack of diversity, the impact of the hierarchy of needs and the differences between pressures felt as a first-year, and as a senior, who has matured in years spent at college. Comparisons were also made between this campus and those of other schools, as well as across cultures, with the reflections of those who have traveled abroad. Woven throughout the explorations of these topics have been theoretical, particularly feminist, perspectives, as well as relevant findings from past research.

In particular, the feminist social constructionist perspective suggests that women's body dissatisfaction comes from social pressures to strive for slenderness, and that the body and its presentation are part of an ongoing constructive project (Frost 41). In a society that controls women through their bodies, unrealistic ideals keep women in a subordinate position, constantly in pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity (Bordo 14). Foucault has termed female bodies, "docile bodies" — whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, "improvement" (Ibid).

Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, make-up, and dress — central organizing principles of time and space in the days of many women — we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification. Through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, insufficiency, of never being good enough. (Bordo 15)

Susan Bartky links Foucauldian "disciplinary power," a form of permanent self-policing, to a range of meanings prescribing what it is to be a woman, which are thoroughly internalized and constantly applied.

Women's magazines and virtually all cultural "texts" in circulation either quite blatantly or more subtly insist that women should be slim women. Dieting and exercise are extolled as routes for achieving this, and the imperative to exercise strict controls over the self are internalized: dieting disciplines the body's hungers: appetite must be monitored at all times and governed by an iron will. Since the innocent need of the organism for food will not be denied, the body becomes one's enemy, an alien being intent on thwarting the disciplinary project. (66)

Bartky also expands upon the link between alienation and an image-obsessed consumer culture, interpreting women's experience of producing themselves as feminized beings as necessarily alienating (34). She argues that women are excluded from full "humanity" because they are over-identified with objectified body parts (35).

Examining a society that encourages women to see themselves as objects, and asking "Who benefits from women's excessive concerns with thinness? How is this obsession created, promoted, and perpetuated?" necessarily leads to an exploration of the impact of a patriarchal, capitalist, consuming culture. The American food and weight loss industries, through corporate practices and advertising campaigns, perpetuate women's dissatisfaction with their looks. Promising a better, happier life through weight loss, which is of course guaranteed if you buy the right pill or product, and by promoting a standard nearly impossible to attain (or maintain), such industries and ruling patriarchal interests alike benefit from women who are so busy trying to control their bodies through dieting, excessive exercise and self-improvement activities, that they lose control over other important aspects of selfhood that might challenge the status quo (Hesse-Biber 32).

Obviously, this issue is complicated. The issues and ideals that surround and control this topic of women's body image are both many and fascinating to me, however depressing the portrait they weave sometimes appears. So where do we go from here—what can be taken from this study, how can it be used, and how ought further research continue? First, I think one of the most enlightening aspects of this study is the number of women I spoke with who not only recognized and criticized the "cult of slenderness" within which we live, but who were also able to speak wisely and in an educated manner about the process they have taken, including steps towards becoming more comfortable with themselves in an environment which isn't always so welcoming. I hope that my subjects weren't simply waxing fondly on their years here, with sentiments of maturing and growing as simply early symptoms of an impending sense of the fond emotions toward St. Olaf that all alumni develop in time. However, because so many of my interviewees noted such a change, from first-year to senior year, I'm not willing to chalk the maturing process up to mere sentimental inklings.

Contrary to the idea that body image may improve in one's four years at college, Sharlene Hesse-Biber's research found downward shifts in the self-esteem of college-women, in terms of their physical attractiveness, social self-confidence, assertiveness, and popularity (93). Further research could examine the discrepancy between these results, as well as the speculation that the coeducational college environment may neither encourage or discourage

women in the pursuit of any but the most traditional roles (Hesse-Biber 94). Another interesting addition to the research on this topic would be more longitudinal studies, examining women both during college and in the years after graduation from it.

My research is one step toward understanding the problems many women face on a daily basis, which may reflect larger issues of oppression in a patriarchal society. It also gives a small yet realistic glimpse at a campus that doesn't seem to want to admit problems and difficulties exist, amidst "community time" and the numbers of students who are actively involved in campus organizations, musical ensembles, volunteer groups, and the large number of students who achieve honors. This study and the women it has depended on have suggested that more can be done on this campus to promote a healthy body image. Perhaps greater emphasis should be placed upon wellness as a whole, to counteract so much emphasis on the body.

Maybe it is futile to think many changes will actually occur to help promote and strengthen a female identity, along with broader options for role definition, identification, achievement, and ideals of feminine attractiveness, as has been suggested (Miller and Pumariega 105). But I think the women in my study do give us hope. Nearly all described their body image as positive, were able to recognize the pervasive "cult of slenderness," and have seen improvements in their own body images as they have progressed through St. Olaf and into life beyond "the hill." Wendy Chapkis agrees that we must identify, and challenge the social underpinnings of our sense of inadequacy, recognizing that, in an economically divided society, clothing and appearance are meant to intimidate by indicating the relative power of class position (174). She adds:

The beautiful woman will continue to serve as a symbol of feminine mystery to the man who desires her and of potency and success to the male who can claim her. And to the women around her, she will remain a symbol of the ideal against which they will be judged. This can only change when beauty loses its distorted power in the evaluation of a "woman's worth"; that is, when the dependent relationship between women and men has been dismantled. (Ibid)

She suggests we learn to look at one another with reflected pride, rather than fear, recognizing and celebrating diversity. As Theresa stated, "Before I used to be really comparative, but now I like to notice how beautiful people's bodies are. And there are a lot of beautiful people on this campus." She, like many other women in my study, has come to realize the diversity, the beauty, of women on this campus, and the benefits that go along with a lack of constant comparing and competing. Perhaps we should look more into how this maturation process occurs, and at what steps this community can take to foster

a truly welcoming environment for women and their differing, beautiful bodies. Maybe change is possible.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

These questions were a base for conducting my interviews; not all questions were asked to each subject, nor were they asked in the same order.

1. How do you define the term “body image?”
2. Describe how you feel about your body.
3. How have these feelings changed?
4. What most affects the way you feel about your body?
5. How does having a boyfriend influence (your body image)?
6. How does being at St. Olaf influence (your body image)?
7. Is there a standard/do you feel pressure to look at certain way at St. Olaf?
8. What has the most positive/negative influence upon your body image?
9. Describe the “perfect” body.
10. What kind of body do you think guys want?
11. Do you discuss body size issues/problems with your friends? How often? How does this make you feel?
12. How has your perception of your body changed as you’ve gotten older/come to college?
13. How is your perception of your body influenced by others?
14. What do you like/dislike most about your body? Why?
15. Do you think a positive body image is important? Why?
16. Do you think most women at St Olaf have a positive body image? Why/not?
17. What should be changed/can be done?

Appendix B
Body Image in Women at St Olaf
Information and Consent Form

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating body image in women at St Olaf. This study is being conducted by _____, an undergraduate at St Olaf under the supervision of Professor Carolyn Anderson, a faculty member from the department of Sociology. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the cultural/social construction of body image, and specifically how this is reflected in the experiences/ideas/reactions of female students at St. Olaf; it is also an investigation into what factors here have a direct influence upon women's body image. Approximately ten people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed one-on-one in a semi-structured format. This will take approximately one hour, over one session.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:

This study has minimal risks, which may include discomfort at some of the questions asked, or in revealing personal information about yourself and your feelings/thoughts/experiences concerning your body image. Benefits may not be direct, but include participating in a study that hopes to benefit the St Olaf community by exploring the issues and problems surrounding women's body image on campus.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be

identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not effect your future relations with St Olaf. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

Contacts and questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, or by email. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, my faculty advisor, Carolyn Anderson, will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact Jo Beld, St Olaf College Institutional Review Board, at beld@stolaf.edu, or at 507-646-3343.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant/Date

Signature of Researcher/Date

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