

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: BODY IMAGE EXPERIENCES AMONG ASIAN
AMERICAN WOMEN: A QUALITATIVE
INTERSECTIONALITY FRAMEWORK

Jennifer Brady, Master of Science, 2016

Directed by: Derek K. Iwamoto, Assistant Professor, Department of
Psychology

Body image concerns are a growing issue among Asian American young adult women and evidence suggests that they experience distinct sociocultural stressors that might heighten risk. This study advanced knowledge through a Grounded Theory qualitative approach and explored the unique experiences of oppression among Asian American undergraduate women ($N=20$) that influence body image dissatisfaction. Participants completed a one hour semi-structured interview describing their socialization experiences; gender and racial identity development; feelings and thoughts about their bodies; beliefs of Western and cultural beauty norms; and body image management strategies. The core category Body Image was comprised of attitudes and perceptions about body weight, shape, and size, facial features (e.g. eye size) and skin complexion/tone. Numerous contextual, interpersonal, and identity conditions, emerged to produce a range of positive and negative body image beliefs. Results can advance etiological understanding of prominent sociocultural factors that may attenuate or heighten risk for body image concerns.

BODY IMAGE EXPERIENCES AMONG ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN: A
QUALITATIVE INTERSECTIONALITY FRAMEWORK

by

Jennifer Brady

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Advisory Committee:

Derek K Iwamoto, Ph.D., Chair

Nazish Salahuddin, Ph.D.

Matthew Miller, Ph.D.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Body image dissatisfaction, or the negative evaluation of one's physical body (Stice & Shaw, 2002), is a serious public health concern that intensifies risk for a number of other negative health outcomes, including depression (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Johnson & Wardle, 2005), low self-esteem (Koff, Benavage, & Wong, 2001), and substance abuse (Wilson, 2000). College aged women, in particular, experience disproportionately higher rates of body image discontent and are more likely to endorse negative beliefs about their body shape and size (Britton Martz, Bazzini, Curin, & LeaShomb, 2006). Despite the well-documented harmfulness of body image concerns for all women, most of the theories of body image dissatisfaction have been tested with White women or draw on comparisons between White women and women of color (Bordo, 2009). This is highly problematic because it obscures the complexity of women's experiences by positioning White women as the "norm," which in turn overemphasizes the thin ideal and underemphasizes racially-salient features and distinct socialization experiences for marginalized groups (Capodilupo & Forsyth, 2014; MASTRIA, 2002; Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2001). Although more recent literature in the past decade has challenged the cultural-boundedness of body dissatisfaction (Cheney, 2011; Cummins, Simmons, & Zane, 2005; Lau, Lum, Chronister, & Forrest, 2006), particular groups of women, such as Asian American women, are still underrepresented. The current study sought to address gaps and extend the research literature by qualitatively exploring how Asian American women's multiple identity statuses intersect with systems of oppression and power to produce distinct body image beliefs.

Dispelling the Model Minority Myth

Many researchers hypothesize that prevailing stereotypes and cultural values that deter help-seeking may contribute to the relative invisibility of Asian American women in the body image literature (Nicdao, Hong, & Takeuchi, 2007; Nichter, 2000). For instance, Asian Americans are often labeled the model minority, which encompasses cultural expectations that each individual will be diligent, intelligent, and self-reliant. This stereotype has been used to justify American values of meritocracy and perpetuates the belief that Asian Americans are protected from discrimination and mental health concerns, including body image dissatisfaction (Yokoyama, 2008). Additionally, Asian American women may be less likely to disclose their negative feelings about their bodies, because it may disrupt group harmony and challenge normative cultural expressions of distress (Kawamura, 2002; Mukai, Kambura, & Sasaki, 1998). This may lead researchers and clinicians to incorrectly assume that Asian American women experience less body dissatisfaction than other racial groups. Importantly, their perceived immunity and voicelessness in mainstream culture (Pyke & Johnson, 2003; Root, 1990; Sue et al., 2007; Yokoyama, 2008) may deter the development of culturally-meaningful and targeted interventions to alleviate risk.

The few studies investigating body image prevalence rates among Asian women yield contradictory findings. For instance, some studies suggest White and Asian women experience similar levels of body dissatisfaction (Gluck & Geliebter, 2002; Grabe & Hyde, 2006). Other emerging research suggests there is a growing trend among Asian American women to aspire to the Western thin ideal (Luo, Parish, & Laumann, 2005) and that they may actually have *thinner* body ideals than White women (Barnett, Keel, &

Conoscenti, 2001). Additionally findings report Asian American women were more likely to be dissatisfied with specific body parts, such as breast size (Forbes & Frederick, 2008) and eyelids (Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999). Yet other studies purport that Asian American women experience less body image dissatisfaction (Nouri, Hill, & Orrell-Valente, 2011), and are less likely to engage in purging behaviors (Crago & Shisslak, 2003). Regardless of the discrepant findings, this research collectively challenges the misconceived notion that body image concerns are simply a “White girl phenomenon” (Mastria, 2002).

Current Sociocultural Models

Most of the studies sampling Asian American women examine femininity, ethnicity, and acculturation practices as salient protective or risk factors for body image concerns. The following sections will review these prominent sociocultural correlates of body image experiences.

Asian American women, similarly to women of other racial groups, may experience pressure to internalize the thin-ideal stereotype, which can increase body preoccupation and body shame (Nouri, Hill & Orrell-Valente, 2011; Phan & Tylka, 2006; Tylka and Subich, 2004). Yet unlike women of other racial groups, Asian American women are often exposed to unique racist and misogynist media representations and narrow gender expectations that can induce gender role strain and exacerbate body image dissatisfaction. For instance, these women are often subject to a number of offensive and degrading stereotypes (e.g. subservient, docile, “doll-like”), and invasive media messages to improve racially-salient features (e.g. eye-lid surgery), that contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth (Espiritu, 1997; Sue et al., 2007; Ting & Hwang, 2008;

Tajima, 1989). Additionally, Asian American women may experience heightened levels of body shame when their bodies may be considered inferior or less attractive than traditional White notions of femininity. Given Asian American women's bodies can be both marginalized (e.g. skin tone) and revered (e.g. slender physique) in various social contexts, it is essential to understand how meaningful contextual factors shape women's body image attitudes and body monitoring.

Numerous researchers have also examined the relationship between ethnic identity and body image concerns among Asian American women (Iyer & Haslam, 2003; Phan & Tylka, 2006; Tsai, Curbow, & Heinberg, 2003). Although many studies note the general protective benefits of ethnic identity (Kawamura, 2002; Phinney, 2003), the relationship between ethnic identity and body image yields contradictory findings. Some research suggests a stronger ethnic identification is associated with a positive sense of self and identity, which in turn can empower Asian American women to challenge Western stereotypic beauty representations and experience lower levels of disordered eating (Tsai, Curbow, & Heinberg, 2003). In this sense, stronger ethnic identification may be celebrated as a source of pride that encourages women to advocate for more expansive definitions of beauty that deemphasize thinness and extend beyond idealistic portrayals of attraction (Cheney, 2011). Yet other research has found that ethnic identity intensifies pressure for thinness and body preoccupation (Phan & Tylka, 2006) and increases risk for eating concerns (Rakhkovskaya & Warren, 2014). Additionally, other studies have found no association between ethnic identity and eating disorders (Cheng, 2014; Iyer & Haslam, 2003). These discrepant findings are hypothesized to exist for two reasons; a) stronger ethnic identification may deter women from making upward social

comparisons to White women's bodies, or b) stronger ethnic identification may entice women to make social comparisons to others in their ethnic group, whom are often physically petite (Lau et al., 2006; Tsai, Curbow, & Heinberg, 2003).

Similar to ethnic identity, acculturation is another salient factor that has been examined in relation to body image among Asian women (Kawamura, 2002). Although theorists have long contended that acculturation to Western cultural beauty norms confers risk for body dissatisfaction (Mastria, 2002), the relationship between acculturation and body image concerns among Asian women is much less clear. There is some consensus that acculturation can result in a double-bind for Asian American women where adherence to either Western or traditional cultural values can heighten risk for body image concerns. Some researchers suggest assimilation to the dominant group can heighten body surveillance and awareness of racialized components of the body that may be considered non-normative or unattractive (Mastria, 2002). Conversely, other research suggests retention of traditional cultural beauty norms within more patriarchal societies can increase pressures to appear thin, modest, and attractive (Smart & Tsong, 2014). Although some researchers have found no empirical evidence supporting a relationship among acculturation, eating pathology, and body image disturbance among diverse ethnic groups (Reddy & Crowther, 2007; Wildes, Emory, & Simons, 2001), others have discovered that stronger adherence to Asian values, and in turn less acculturation, was more predictive of greater overall body image dissatisfaction (Tsai, Curbow, & Heinberg, 2003; Lau, Lum, Chronister, & Forrest, 2006). A study by Tsong and Smart (2015) with a community sample of Asian American women ($N=324$) mirrors these findings in that women who endorsed particular traditional cultural values (e.g. family recognition

through achievement and emotional self-control) reported more disordered eating. Collectively, these mixed findings underscore the importance of understanding Asian American women's body image experiences in relation to variant hierarchies of beauty, distinct cultural values and beliefs, and sense of attachment and belonging.

Limitations in Current Models

Although a few scholars have begun to quantitatively test comprehensive theoretical models of body image concerns among Asian American women (Cheng, 2014; Phan & Tylka, 2006), the broad current literature is riddled with discrepant findings. Methodological limitations may contribute to the limited consensus of etiological correlates of body image experiences among Asian American women. For instance, prior studies have been criticized for their use of measures not validated for Asian Americans, reliance on varying definitions of eating disorders, and conceptual overlap of cultural variables (Cummins, Simmons, & Zane, 2005; Mazzeo & Espelage, 2002). Another criticism concerns the use of benchmark comparisons between two or more ethnically diverse women and White women which minimizes the unique sociocultural context for ethnic minorities and neglects to honor diverse expressions of attractiveness, such as skin tone (Cash, Morrow, Hrabosky & Perry, 2004). Particular groups of Asian American women also tend to escape scrutiny, such as women of South Asian backgrounds (Iyer & Haslam, 2003), and many studies do not differentiate between women of different cultural backgrounds by aggregating findings (Reddy & Crowther, 2007). Current theoretical approaches also understate the importance of racial identity and racial discrimination in influencing risk. Accordingly, limited knowledge exists about how Asian American women's multiple intersecting identities (e.g. gender and race)

interact with broader systems of power and beauty hierarchies to influence body image. By negating the cultural, historical, and political context of individual women, important cultural distinctions and correlates of body image concerns are often overgeneralized and inconsistent.

Intersectionality: A Recommended Theoretical Approach

Intersectionality approaches, particularly within feminist perspectives (Davis, 2008), have been recently praised for their ability to provide new answers to long-standing questions in psychology (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). Given Asian American women have been traditionally excluded from the body image literature, intersectional approaches can facilitate increased understanding of what has been traditionally overlooked in prior theoretical models relying on White samples and can repair misconceptions in the field (Cole, 2009). More specifically, by exploring systems of inequality tied to membership in multiple social categories, this approach offers a new and more nuanced framework to better understand the body image experiences of Asian American women.

Theoretical Overview

An intersectionality theoretical framework attends to the meaning and experiences embedded within multiple categories of identity, difference, and inequality and recognizes that such social categories are inextricably interconnected or intertwined (Cole, 2009; Shields, 2008; Warner, 2009). Additionally this perspective emphasizes both the homogeneity and diversity within gender as well as the fluidity of these categories, with some identities emerging more prominently in certain contexts than others (Cole, 2009). It also emphasizes dimensions of power and oppression and how they are

embedded within or perpetuated by membership in multiple social categories (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). Within the body image literature, researchers are more often attending to the diversity within gender by exploring women's multiple marginalized identities (e.g. race, ethnicity, sexual orientation) and contexts of disadvantage and difference, such as media exposure and representation, to better understand the unique body image experiences of women of color (Nouri et al., 2011; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004). Yet, the research on Asian American women's body image experiences often neglects to explore how race-related variables, including racism, influence body image beliefs and often does not consider how body image beliefs might change when race and/or gender are made salient, such as when experiencing race-related teasing or catcalling from men. Recent scholars have challenged assumptions about the contextual stability of social identities and have instead called for more research critically examining how identities and their salience are fluid and shifting (Diamond, 2008; Warner & Shields, 2013). It is then critical to understand social and cultural contexts, such as racial discrimination, and their contribution to the salience of identities, to better understand within-group variability in body image experiences.

Although racism, racial identity, and oppression have been empirically examined in relation to Black women's body images (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Kawamura, 2011; Kempa & Thomas, 2000; Striegel-Moore & Smolak, 2000; Watson, Ancis, White, & Nazari, 2013), few studies have investigated these experiences among Asian American women. It is critical to explore how racism influences body image concerns among Asian American women because of their unique racial socialization experience. Even though Asian Americans are stereotyped as a model minority with a privileged status (Qin, Way,

& Mukherjee, 2008), these women are often infantilized and exoticized as submissive sexual objects and are targets of racial-teasing that marginalizes and denigrates race-related features (e.g. eye size, skin tone). A few researchers who have examined these experiences of oppression suggest that frequency and exposure to racial and ethnic teasing intensified body shape concern and maladaptive eating attitudes (Cummins & Lehman, 2007; Iyer & Haslam, 2003; Reddy & Crowther, 2007). The results of a study by Cheng (2014) also mirror these findings, as a history of racial/ethnic teasing and perceived discrimination among Asian American college women ($N=587$) was associated with lower self-esteem, greater endorsement of media beauty ideals, and more body dissatisfaction. Although more research is needed to clarify these findings, these studies suggest body image issues among Asian American women are, in part, reflective of internalized racism and negative beliefs of self-worth.

Intersectional Etiological Framework

The etiology of body image concerns among Asian American women are multifaceted and complex, yet are often oversimplified through the examination single dimensions of identity, such as gender, or ethnicity, or race, rather than the intersection of women's multiple identity statuses. It is essential to understand women's occupation of multiple social categories, and their salience in different social contexts, in influencing how Asian American women perceive their bodies as well as how their bodies are externally evaluated. This approach will foster a more nuanced understanding of body image experiences by considering the intersectional effects of sexism and racism in producing an array of body image beliefs. Additionally, given many prior studies frame body image as a stable, trait-level characteristic across time and contexts, it is imperative

to explore body image as a socially-constructed process that is influenced by situational factors and women's interconnected and fluid identities (Melnik et al., 2004). Qualitative methods offer an ideal way to explore the distinct, unique socialization processes of these women and racially-salient body image beliefs that are not captured in the present body image measures. This qualitative intersectional perspective offers a meaningful developmental framework for understanding body image as an evolving, contextually-based construct that is affected by both individualistic (e.g. core cultural values) and broader structural factors (e.g. racism). By understanding the social meanings of the body in relation to Asian American women's intersecting identities, this research can offer an etiological framework to better understand the context and systems of disadvantage that may shape body image beliefs.

Current Study

The current study used a grounded theory (GT) approach to examine the body image experiences of undergraduate Asian American women born in the United States ($N=20$). Asian American women born in the U.S. were intentionally selected because emerging evidence suggests they may experience heightened levels of body image concern due to bicultural stress (Tsong & Smart, 2015). These women may also experience distinct racial discrimination (i.e. often perceived as a perpetual foreigner) and must contend with criticism and pressure from multiple cultures with potentially incongruent values (Lee, Wong, & Alvarez, 2009; Smart et al., 2011). Additionally, women born in the United States may experience greater family conflict, particularly in navigating differences in acculturation and cultural expectations in their families (Castillo, Zahn, & Cano, 2011). Since the current literature lacks a cohesive framework

to understand the etiology of body image concerns for Asian American women, this study explored the following research questions through semi-structured interviews: a). How do Asian American women perceive their bodies?, b). How are Asian American women's body image beliefs influenced by their gender and race? c). How do Asian American women manage their body image beliefs in contexts of power, inequality, and privilege?

Similarly to other notable grounded theory studies (Pyke & Johnson, 2003), the authors offered no formal hypotheses for testing and rather sought to ground the findings in the rich self-defined experiences of Asian American women to generate a theory based upon their subjective body image experiences. This enabled the authors to understand the salience of cultural context in influencing body image for these women as well as to clarify and investigate seldom-studied phenomena.

Chapter 2: Method

Participants

Women who identified as Asian or Asian American were invited to participate from a large Mid-Atlantic university using criterion-based sampling (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). Twenty participants were interviewed as evidence suggests this number is an acceptable sample size for qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Participants ranged in age from 18-22 years (mean age=19.35) and represented a variety of ethnicities: Chinese ($n=6$), Korean ($n=3$), Indian ($n=2$), Bengali ($n=1$), Vietnamese ($n=1$), and Pakistani ($n=1$). Six women reported mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds and were included because they self-identified as Asian American. Participants represented a diverse range of college majors, hobbies, and college socialization experiences. All participants met the following inclusion criteria at the time of the interview: a) currently a full-time student at the University of Maryland, b) aged 17-25 and c) born in the United States. Participants were not able to participate if there was evidence to suggest a dual-relationship (i.e. student or therapy client) with the first or second authors who conducted the interviews. Table 1 presents more detailed demographic information with participants identified by pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Researchers

Consistent with constructivist qualitative research paradigms (Morrow, 2005), and the focus of GT researchers as instruments (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), it is especially important to openly acknowledge and embrace the positioning of the researcher as a co-creator of meaning who is biased in her interpretations and assumptions of the data. The first author, a White female doctoral student in counseling psychology, was

responsible for recruiting, determining eligibility, scheduling and interviewing participants. She has prior clinical experience working with body image concerns and disordered eating among young adults, as well as prior experience conducting qualitative research. Throughout the project, she reflected on her own visible privileged identities as well as her personal journey assisting friends through their recovery with eating disorders. The second author, a first-generation Turkish-American female doctoral student in counseling psychology, was responsible for interviewing participants and analyzing the data. She, along with the first author, have experience identifying sociocultural risk and resiliency factors that influence health outcomes among Asian American women. The other three members of the research team, a biracial female graduate student of African American and White descent, a male undergraduate student identifying as Caribbean-American, and a second-generation Korean-American female, assisted in data analysis. An expert auditor, a fourth-generation Japanese American male professor with expertise in examining health disparities among Asian American populations, offered keen insight and feedback that informed category development.

Generally, the researchers expected a majority, but not all, Asian American women would experience some dissatisfaction with their bodies. Additionally, they believed women would share receiving conflicting messages about what is attractive depending on their audience, such as a White male versus a culturally-similar female. The researchers also were interested in the differences between global body dissatisfaction and state-like body discontent, as well as how the degree of identification or belonging to racial/ethnic peer groups on campus may influence body image concerns.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via flyers distributed in academic buildings and dormitories and a university psychology research participation system. See Appendix B. Recruitment materials stated that the researcher was interested in exploring body image experiences and shifting body image beliefs in the context of Asian American women's intersecting identities. If the participant elected to participate in the in-person interview, the first author distributed a brief pre-screening instrument through an online survey to ensure the participants adhered to the specified inclusion and exclusion criteria noted above. The pre-screening instrument inquired about participant demographics and featured three questions about body image (e.g. body image satisfaction, likes, dislikes about body) that were incorporated into the in-person interview to make it more personalized. See Appendix C. The first author scheduled an individual interview time for all eligible participants. All participants were compensated with extra credit for their psychology courses. Interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes and were conducted between November 2015 and May 2016.

Interview protocol. At the onset of the semi-structured interview, participants were asked to read and sign the consent form as approved by a University Institutional Review Board detailing the purpose of the study, nature of confidentiality, risks and benefits of participation, and anonymity of responses. The interviewers informed the women that they can withdraw from the interview process at any point without penalty or explanation. The interviews were conducted in a quiet, confidential location on campus in the first author's office. Light refreshments, including water and snacks, were provided to help make the interview process appear as comfortable and inviting as possible. All

interviews were recorded using a secure audio recording device and transcribed verbatim. To protect the participant's confidentiality, any identifying information about the women, or other individuals disclosed during the interviews, was deleted from the transcript. Participant interviews were then immediately assigned an identification number and pseudonyms will be used throughout the duration of this article to ensure anonymity. See Appendix D for a copy of the consent form.

Interview questions. Following an extensive review of the body image literature on Asian American women, the first author developed interview questions. The semi-structured interview questions were constructed through a feminist lens to engage the participants in a shared and collaborative dialogue about their shifting body image experiences, cultural beauty norms, and body image comparison processes (Yokoyama, 2008). The interview questions encouraged flexibility and spontaneity in responses and offered space for the exploration of power dynamics, the gendered and racialized meanings of the body, as well as women's broader life histories within the context of their family relationships. Given the exploratory nature of this study, it was especially important that the researchers allowed the participants to select their own wording so their subjective body image experiences could naturally emerge. The questions were constantly readjusted to reflect relevant and meaningful topics for each woman (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hill et al., 2005). It is important to note that participants were not directly asked about experiences of racism or stereotyping; if women initiated discussion of these topics the first or second author inquired thoroughly and empathically. Approximately three months after the interview, participants were contacted a second time via email to discuss the emerging thematic construction. This served as an opportunity to invite

feedback about the developing coding domains and to reaffirm that participants are the true experts of their experiences. Two women responded and they clarified the role of modesty as related to covering up one's body, suggested eating disorders are less talked about in Asian countries but not less prevalent, and clarified that Asian beauty practices are more narrow in comparison to multiple beauty images in America. See Appendix E for the interview questions.

Enhancing rigor. The researchers approached each stage of the research process thoughtfully to enhance and better ensure the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Morrow, 2005). To establish trustworthiness and achieve consensus in the findings, an expert auditor verified the accuracy of the thematic construction and participant checks via email were conducted to invite feedback about the developing theories (Creswell, 2013). Throughout the interview and data analytic process, all members of the research team kept detailed field notes and reflexive journals that served as a tool for active engagement with personal biases, reactions, expectations, and assumptions. They then used this as a guide to facilitate open discussion and acknowledge varying viewpoints during the analytic process. A detailed chronology of the research activities, or audit trail, was also composed in an effort to make the research process as explicit and repeatable as possible. Lastly, the researchers used methods triangulation, through the use of multiple researchers and multiple analytic methods to reduce the likelihood of individual bias (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011; Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999).

Data Analysis

Grounded theory (GT) offers a platform for exploring the subjective lived experiences of participants to facilitate the generation of a new theory or framework (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Given the limited literature on the cultural influences of body image concerns among Asian American women, an inductive constructivist approach is especially helpful as it assumes previous theories tested with other women of color and White women may not apply. Additionally, GT acknowledges women as the true experts of their experiences (Fassinger, 2005) and allows for the coexistence of multiple realities and an understanding of how power dynamics interact in various social and historical arenas. This approach is well-suited for garnering insight into how Asian American women make meaning of their unique socialization experiences and how these experiences in turn shape their body image beliefs. This analytic method was joined with Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) principles to extract the typicality of category responses across participants and to promote a research climate of consensus in which power dynamics are acknowledged and diverse worldviews are valued (Hill et al., 2005). The fusion of these two analytic methods permitted a more comprehensive view of the complexities and ambiguities of the data.

Data analysis was conducted with the GT methods outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and the principles of consensus, mutual respect, and shared power, advocated for by Hill and colleagues (2005). In the first step of the analysis, all members of the research team individually read each interview transcript and thoughtfully recorded interpretative notes, assumptions, and expectations that influenced their understanding of the data. The research team was then divided into two smaller coding teams who met biweekly with the

first author to investigate the complexities and nuances of participant experiences. This smaller coding meeting encouraged more active participation among all members and improved decision making quality.

Each coding team was given half of the transcripts for the first stage of analysis. The members of the research team first conducted *open coding*, where the data were divided line-by-line into segments based upon the phenomenon being investigated. More concise statements were developed collaboratively in coding meetings where members of the research team examined patterns, implicit meanings, and differences in the codes. Following intensive open coding over the course of many months, the research team engaged in *axial coding* in which the aforementioned line-by-line codes were expanded into broader categories based upon their perceived similarities and shared meaning. At this stage of analysis, theoretical connections across transcripts were beginning to develop and the first author constructed multiple visual depictions of the data to underscore the relationships between the categories. Lastly, through *selective coding*, higher-level themes were developed by the first author, and verified by the expert auditor and coding teams, in a way that articulated a coherent understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Finally, the frequency of occurrences of these thematic categories was coded as either general (all cases, or all but one case), typical (half of cases), or variant (less than half of cases but more than one case). Consistent with GT approaches, the researchers used a constant comparative method in which they moved in and out of the data collection and analysis process by reconstructing questions to capture emergent or meaningful themes and modifying categories and coding schema based upon new information. This iterative process occurred until thematic internal homogeneity and

external heterogeneity were reached. Data saturation was determined through the use of discriminant sampling by interviewing four women after the initial development of the model to verify the relationships between the categories and the story-line (Creswell, 2013). After twenty interviews, it was clear that saturation was reached as evidenced by the redundancy in responses (Patton, 1990).

Chapter 3: Results

In our analysis we sought to understand Asian American women's unique experiences of oppression at the intersections of gender and race and their subsequent impacts on the way they evaluate, perceive, and feel about their bodies. Most often women reported negative beliefs about their bodies and shared experiences where they felt exposed, objectified, exoticized, and self-conscious. Women did comment on liked body image features, but did not discuss their positive body image beliefs in great detail. We divided the results of the analysis into a hierarchy of interactional systems that influenced and informed body image experiences: Domain 1 (Contextual Conditions) is comprised of a) navigating cultural beauty norms, and b) experiences of sexism and racism; Domain 2 (Interpersonal Influences) is comprised of a) peer influences and b) parental influences; Domain 3 (Identity Formation Processes) is comprised of a) integrated identity appreciation and b) disintegrated identity depreciation. Women navigated within and across these interactional systems with some categories emerging more prominently for individual women depending on context and subsequent impact on body image beliefs. Each category is comprised of multiple properties. A summary of the frequency of responses within each category is presented in Table 2. In the following sections, I describe the contextual, interpersonal, and identity domains that influence body image, the consequences of these domains on women's evaluations of their bodies, and women's sources of resiliency and coping strategies for managing their body image beliefs. The results underscore the importance of developing a new model for understanding body image experiences among Asian American women.

Core Concept: Body Image

All women described their feelings (e.g. dissatisfaction), attitudes (e.g. beliefs of attractiveness), and behaviors (e.g. exercise, make-up routines) related to their body image and overall appearance. Many participants defined body image as both self-perceptions and evaluations from others, particularly family members, romantic partners, and peers, about their appearance, body shape, or specific features. Many women also described their thoughts and feelings about their bodies based upon racialized features and stereotypes perpetuated by others (e.g. Asians as “doll-like,” mono-lids, skin tone) and the media. Similarly to a notable qualitative study exploring body image among African American women (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014), particular body image features, such as breast size, eye-shape and color and skin complexion, appear just as salient as body weight and body structure for Asian American women. Overall, Asian American women described their body image experiences in terms of a) body structure, b) facial features, and c) skin complexion/tone.

Body structure. All women ($N=20$) discussed some degree of self-consciousness, dissatisfaction, or self-criticism surrounding their body weight, shape, and size. Many women commented on their desire for a flatter, thinner stomach, longer and leaner limbs, larger breasts, or slender overall physique. Most women ($n=14$) expressed specific discontent with their weight and fat distribution throughout their body, with many women feeling overweight due to comparisons with slimmer Asian peers. In contrast, a few women ($n=5$) expressed satisfaction and appreciation for their body structure yet many times this self-acceptance was placed in a context of adherence to idealized cultural beauty norms. For instance, Nancy and Indra shared their privileged role of having a

skinny frame, Jacqueline discussed the benefits of being taller than her relatives, and Yun discussed possessing more desirable curves (e.g. curvaceous butt and breast size) than her other Asian peers.

Facial features. Many women (n=13) discussed a range of feelings and beliefs about visible facial features, such as eye color/ shape/ size, nose bridges, and eye brows. Women disclosed discontent with their “button nose” (Fatima), self-consciousness about their lack of eyebrows (Yun), and desire for dark hair to emphasize paleness (Connie). Most women juxtaposed these features against White features, which were often perceived as more desirable, privileged, or sought after. A few women also described how their race-related facial features symbolize racial hierarchies and oppression and how they feel uniquely objectified and dehumanized. For instance, Min stated:

I think some ideals are kind of the same in the way that like I think Asian women have a lot of problems with how they think about their eyes because people object them ... So Asian women always want to make their eyes bigger and their noses smaller.

Many women discussed the importance of eye shape, size, or color (n=10) and perceived bigger eyes (Esther) that were double-lidded (Adeline) and light-colored (Fatima) as attractive and desirable.

Skin complexion/tone. Many women (n=13) commented on their desire for a smooth, clear, acne-free skin complexion as well as their difficulty navigating disparate cultural beauty norms of attractive skin color. Many of these women reported struggling to manage breakouts and felt more insecure and unattractive when family members or peers pointed out these imperfections. For instance Jenny stated “I feel like I put myself down a little, just because I see flaws when I look in the mirror and oh, I have scabs here and I have a pimple here.” These women described flawless, youthful, wrinkle-free skin as a desirable Eastern beauty norm that was often associated with social class (e.g.

financial resources to buy beauty products). Additionally, many women discussed possessing darker or tanner skin color than their other Asian peers and how this is remarkably different from Eastern beauty norms that emphasize fair skin. While women often described a slew of products and practices they could use to obtain lighter skin, many of them (n=9) reported feeling satisfied with achieving a tanner complexion in part as a way to assimilate to Western cultural beauty norms, as illustrated by Arpana:

I think it's different. A lot of my friends want to tan, they think it's cool to tan and like when I go home my mom is like, have you been wearing sun screen? Like here's a hat, here's sunglasses, wear all of that.

Collectively, women's beliefs about their body structure, facial features, and skin complexion were influenced by their exposure to distinct environmental related stressors.

Domain One: Contextual Conditions

All participants devoted significant time to exploring broad-level environmental conditions that influenced internal and external evaluations of their body shape, size, and features. Women discussed contending with restricting beauty standards, dehumanizing and limiting stereotypes, and hurtful microaggressions that were mostly perpetrated by strangers and the media.

Category 1. Navigating cultural beauty norms. All women discussed their roles in actively negotiating and navigating multiple, and at times conflicting, standards of beauty. Mostly all women described a shared understanding of Eastern beauty norms that were beautiful and desirable; however South Asian women additionally described curvy hips and minimal body hair as attractive features. These standards of beauty were often part-focused, (e.g. fair skin, porcelain features, petite physique, black thick hair) and more narrowly-defined compared to Western beauty norms, which were perceived as more accepting of multiple images of beauty. A few women described the sociopolitical

and historical context that shaped this narrow conceptualization of attraction by stating that appealing features were a way of demonstrating social class and status, rather than a way of mirroring Western beauty ideals (e.g. fair skin). For example Min disclosed:

I think they are very different, from, well like certain, certain things are kind of seen as Asian women trying to look more Western. I think there definitely is sort of an ideal especially that the pale skin maybe but I think people misconstrue that a little bit because a lot of that is also from where you are born in China and how you grew up. So women of mobility wouldn't have to go outside and they wouldn't have to work in the fields. So they like they generally had a lot more paler skin, which like also could have been a European influence but like a lot of it is just your rank. Like royalty wouldn't have to go outside so they wouldn't have darker skin.

Other women also reported feeling constricted and limited by the pressure in Asian cultures to fit “one template of a body,” as expressed by Connie. This sentiment was also reflected by Chrissie who felt constrained by this narrow conceptualization of attractiveness.

I think that in terms of like, Western society they definitely realize there are different type of things that will be attractive to different people. Whereas, in China, they kind of have just one standard.

Interestingly, despite feeling restricted to fit a certain ideal, women often positioned their own disliked or unattractive features in relation to the absence of perceived desirable traits and features in Asian countries. Many women expressed wishing for “better skin like those Korean stars” (Adeline), “jet black hair” like the ideal Chinese woman (Min), deep-set eyes (Yun), smaller feet (Nancy) and less body hair compared to other South Asian women (Arpana). This is illustrated in Connie’s comment about desire for a petite body frame:

I guess, since my family background and my culture emphasizes on kind of a petite body frame, that kind of resulted in my dissatisfaction of my neck down, sort of, just because it’s like, oh, I naturally have – not a wider body frame but like my shoulders are bigger than average. I have more muscle or more flesh in my arms and legs, and a little bit on my stomach than average. So I guess there’s dissatisfaction from that.

In contrast to their perceived dislikes about their body, women's self-prescribed likes about their body shape and features were often juxtaposed with declarations of their distinctness, uniqueness, or deviation from how Asian women typically look. Women also described liking features that are highly valued across geographic contexts, such as slenderness, thinness, lighter skin tone, and longer limbs, as reflected by Chloe and Jacqueline.

Yeah I feel like that also isn't as much of a problem for me because there are lots of Asian women that have like monolids and their eyes are like smaller than mine are so I feel like that never really was an issue for me that much growing up

I guess what I like about my body is I guess, I kind of like my legs, because I don't know, in Vietnam we're all small. 'Cause Asians are small in general. But then whenever I go to family parties, I'm always like taller than half the people there. So then, I guess they always say "Oh my gosh, she's so tall." And I guess I kind of feel confident in that sense.

Women's body image narratives were often contextualized within multiple hierarchies of beauty and many women expressed difficulty in achieving Western beauty norms because of biological differences in genetic make-up. Many women expressed discontent in their ability to embody Western standards of attractiveness, particularly curvaceous butts, lighter eyes, double eyelids, and larger breast sizes. These women often were sensitively attuned to external cues in their environments that dictate expectations of attractiveness with some noting that their consumption of American media induced more negative feelings about their body. While many women described the unattainable, unrealistic, and restrictive media images that generally lacked representation of women of color (Blake Lively, Cara Delevingne, Kim Kardashian, Emma Watson), it was only when these standards were internalized that women experienced heightened awareness of their perceived appearance-related deficits. For example, Elaine shared:

I think I definitely compare myself more to American pop culture so when you watch like movies or listen to songs and stuff a lot of the women are very curvaceous and it's like beautiful and they have the perfect hourglass figure. So for me because I don't have that it's hard for me to be at an 8 on the scale. Maybe if I had compared myself to more Asian women maybe I would like myself a little bit better, or I mean like my body a little bit more.

Western features, while not explicitly idealized, were often sought after and preferred in a heteronormative context as a way to appear attractive and sexy to other men. A few women described instances of comparing their physical features and body shape to White women. This comparison process to White women often instilled feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and body criticism, with some women, such as Jenny, explicitly questioning why she can't achieve this supposed more privileged and revered body image.

Like in particular my last boyfriend, he was very, very White. His ex-girlfriend was this pretty blond girl with curly long blond hair...So it was just like comparing myself being like okay well this is the type of person he dates and I'm not like that, so what's going to happen? Just like kind of self-doubt. I think it used to really bother me just because I'd be like why, why am I not this way, why do I not look a certain way, why am I built this way?

Additionally many women, like Sunita, expressed discontent in watching White women receive positive attention from male peers, which often contributed to heightened feelings of body shame.

I just felt, well cause, especially growing up, all the girls, cause I go to mostly a predominately White school, so everyone was like White and blond and skinny...And so I thought like the ideal thing that people, that guys want, I guess at the time focus on what the guys want was like skinnier legs. And I didn't have that.

One woman, Chloe, also noted the complexities of ascribing to White societal beauty standards wherein she feels pulled in a heteronormative context to look White but simultaneously receives negative repercussions in her cultural context for eschewing her

Asian identity. This may not directly contribute to body dissatisfaction for women but does seem to indirectly impact women's self-worth and sense of belonging.

Additionally, several women normalized and justified the extreme practices necessary to achieve Western features, such as plastic surgery to acquire double eyelids or to enhance breast size. Importantly, all women negotiated multiple contexts that shape how they are perceived and evaluated and at times actively defended and advocated for diverse representations of beauty. However, in addition to navigating multiple cultural beauty standards and White aesthetic beauty ideals, Asian American women also described how experiences of oppression shape their body image beliefs.

Category 2. Experiences of sexism and racism. Many women (n=13) reported a distinct awareness of societal feminine expectations to be nurturing, submissive, pure, obedient, and quiet. The intersection of racism and sexism resulted in unique challenges for Asian American women who described messages to be hyper-feminine in traditional cultural contexts (e.g. subservient to men) that seemed devaluing, degrading, and constraining. This is illustrated in the sentiment by Jamie:

I still feel like there is just that awful stigma that Asian American women are supposed to be, you know, like really gentle and docile and submissive and, I don't know, to speak really frankly that really bothers me.

Women shared their experiences navigating conflicting and at times contradictory feminine stereotypes in relation to their audience. For instance, many women discussed performing their femininity differently depending on the context and cultural expectations, whether it is dressing more modestly around Indian relatives (Sunita) or being more assertive and out spoken around White peers (Chloe).

Importantly, many women shared instances of navigating limiting and racialized expectations of appearance that objectified their bodies differently from the experiences

of women of other racial groups. Women identified an attractive Asian woman as one who is “doll-like” (Jenny), child-like, with porcelain-like features (Chrissie), such as doe-eyed, smooth complexion, and skinny physique, that can resemble cartoons (Grace). A few women also discussed being exoticized for their racialized features and “presented to everyone else” (Connie) to be evaluated and critiqued based upon race. As a result of feeling on display, Connie engaged in a variety of impression management strategies to craft an image of perfection, in wearing her hair and make-up just right, or dressing a certain way. Most women reported feeling exposed, increasingly self-conscious, and critiqued differently because of their outward appearance as an Asian woman,” with Esther noting that it felt like a “spotlight” was on her.

Additionally, some women reported adhering to cultural expectations to dress modestly as a way to shield themselves from sexual objectification. A few women (n=7) discussed the importance of covering one’s body to avoid unwanted attention, body evaluations, and sexual advances from men. Shabani described wanting to hide her body and Arpana recalled feeling more self-conscious, and in turn self-objectifying her body, when men stare at her breasts. Yet one woman, Sana, described the protective role of wearing her hijab as it welcomed a more respectful gaze from male peers.

I do understand and see that it makes a difference in how people treat you. You do I guess get more of the respectful gaze from others instead of the cat-calling or the discomfort that I have seen happen to friends if I’m with them.

Women’s hyper-vigilance about their appearance and increased body monitoring, when coupled with cultural expectations of modesty, resulted in downplaying and disavowing liked body image features. It appeared that an awareness of body imperfections evoked a perpetual state of discontent because women believed there was “always room for improvement” (Nancy), whether through exercising more or eating

healthier. A few women also described fears of being “self-absorbed” (Sunita) in claiming one’s attractiveness and the taboo nature of disavowing this cultural practice in their communities as illustrated by Jamie:

Even if you’re like, pretty or thin you should never call yourself pretty or thin, because that’s just really like, rude and taboo.

In addition to exotification and sexual objectification of Asian women’s bodies, many women described exposure to race-related teasing and stereotyping about their Asian identity and appearance. A few women discussed hurtful instances of feeling typecasted by peer and authority figures as being “good at math” (Jenny) or pigeonholed as a housewife who knows “how to do chores really well” (Chrissie). Moreover, even though all women were born in the United States, women were objectified as perpetual foreigners and felt pressured to defend their nationality. Other women discussed heightened feelings of vulnerability and awareness of their race and appearance when peers would tease them about their accent, their caramel skin color (Arpana) or make comments about their “chinky” eyes (Esther). This exposure to racial microaggressions was associated with increased body surveillance, appearance preoccupation, and a general sense of isolation, loss of individuality, and dehumanization.

Collectively, these broad-level contextual conditions, including conflicting messages about attraction, idealization of White features, awareness of feminine stereotypes and exposure to racism and race-related teasing, presented unique challenges for Asian American women and often contributed to feeling dissatisfied with body image features.

Domain Two: Interpersonal Influences

All women were invited to explore the ways in which meaningful close relationships with others shaped their beliefs of attraction, salience of appearance, and attitudes toward liked and disliked body image features. Women most often described the roles of their parents, particularly their mothers, and peers, in influencing their body image.

Category 1. Parental influences. Many women (n=13) described instances of receiving unsolicited feedback and criticism from family members about their body shape or features, most of which concerned weight gain, weight loss, or acne. Women also reported receiving conflicting feedback, such as being told to gain weight after previously being told to lose weight. These instances appeared to intensify body dissatisfaction and feelings of inadequacy because women believed they could never fulfill their parent's expectations of attractiveness. Although parents' body teasing and vocalized disapproval about disliked features were perceived as hurtful and intrusive by many women, a few women were also quick to defend these experiences by rationalizing them as a normal cultural practice. For example, participants Chrissie and Jacqueline reflected on the customary nature of these exchanges:

Well, for example, there's fat-shaming in the U.S., where everybody is saying that it's not okay and you're supposed to embrace how you look, but then I feel like in Asian cultures, it's perfectly acceptable for someone to go up to you and be like "You're too fat, you need to lose weight."

I guess it means quite a bit. I guess I know that the women, like, they would like to point out flaws. Like, a lot. Like right in front of you, kind of. They don't even do it behind your back or anything. They'll just say it right in front of you

Additionally a few women associated unsolicited comments with a way of showing love and affection in their family, particularly when family members encouraged them to eat

more. Shabani also noted plumpness was associated with health in her Indian community and could signify social class and ability to afford resources. Some women, such as Lin, also minimized and made light of these experiences as a protective mechanism to maintain appearances and preserve respect for their family.

Well... [sigh] This is... I don't want to make my mom kind of look bad but, she did tell me that I was fat a lot... not a lot, just like, sometimes, just in passing right?

Yet other women noted feeling resentful, aggravated, embarrassed, self-critical, and dissatisfied with certain features due to recurrent instances of body criticism. Some women also shared feelings of helplessness and powerlessness in their family dynamics to prevent further instances of body shaming. These women noted that family members often rationalize pointing out flaws by framing them as a “joke” (Chloe) or “poking fun” (Elaine) in an attempt to make them less threatening and upsetting.

Not really because he would say it in such a joking way that it's like, oh if I said something, he would be like 'oh why are you upset, I was just joking.'

Other women, such as Adeline, questioned the futility of offering negative feedback, particularly when the features and perceived appearance deficits are something she cannot control.

My mom and them point out pimples and stuff, so it's kind of annoying because I'm just, I can't do anything about it

Unsolicited comments from family members seemed to intersect with the quality of the family relationship; women who reported more instances of tension, intergenerational family conflict (e.g. discrepancies and disagreements over adherence to family values, practices, expectations), and lack of affection in their family relationships appeared more negatively impacted by instances of family teasing. Additionally, a few women described

feeling pressured to comply with traditional gender role expectations to be a prototypical Asian daughter—one who obeys cultural traditions (e.g. sexual purity, sacrifice career for marriage) and positively reflects on the family. These sources of conflict, coupled with recurrent critiques about body shape and size, seemed to contribute to heightened body dissatisfaction. The salience of appearance, particularly the mother’s prioritization of maintaining her appearance, also impacted many women. These women often recalled their mother’s own devotion to grooming and then modeled their mother’s behavior through recurrent appearance fixing and checking. On the other hand, women who reported feeling accepted, validated, and supported in their family relationships were less likely to internalize instances of teasing as a reflection of their self-worth. These women also tended to deemphasize the value of appearance and recognized the importance of appreciating other desirable parts of the self, such as health, intelligence, and personality. This reconditioning of appearance-related self-worth is exemplified in the sentiment from Nancy:

And so it’s sort of, I dunno, like this feeling that even if your body changes they’ll still accept you for who you are, like it doesn’t matter what you look like on the outside ‘cause they know what you are on the inside. So I think that like contributes to it.

Category 2. Peer influences. All women shared detailed accounts of receiving feedback about their appearance from same-sex peers. A few women discussed the confusing dynamics of receiving compliments from other women, particularly when friends praise features that are biologically endowed (e.g. thin frame, small breast size). These women were often skeptical of these compliments and unsure of how to respond, which may be in part due to modesty but also reflective of the self-deprecating context in which it is given, such as with Nancy:

I don't really know how to respond to it. Because it's like this is how I was born. This is what I look like, I can't change anything about it. And it's I guess it's meant as a compliment but it's, I dunno, I mean I don't go around saying like, "Oh you're normal size."

Other women shared similar feelings of self-doubt, disbelief or hesitation to accept positive feedback from other women, with a few women, such as Indra, directly questioning their friends' intentions or disputing the feedback:

I know I am a person when I get complimented, like oh you look nice in whatever outfit, like oh thank you and I'll try to play it off and like deflect it.

Some women also described feeling infantilized by being called "cute" rather than "hot" (Jenny, Grace) and self-critical when comments from women occurred in a context where they are already vulnerable and exposed (e.g. changing, swimming). During these moments, women shared feeling more hyper-vigilant about their body image and perceived appearance-deficits and would engage in more negative self-talk about their bodies. Interestingly, unlike feedback from family members, feedback from female friends was more often disputed, contested, or renegotiated, rather than accepted at face value. This may in part be a reflection of a broader patriarchal context whereby women can assert more agency to challenge feedback from other same-sex peers but do not feel as comfortable asserting their own opinions with men or elders due to power differentials.

Same-sex peer feedback often motivated further body image comparisons between women that intensified self-consciousness and accentuated disliked body image features. Even though a majority of women identified the self-destructive risks of body image comparisons, almost all women reported engaging in some form of comparisons. Shabani described it as a "cycle" of "self-consciousness" where the subsequent anxiety and self-criticism from body image comparisons often motivated further appearance checking, fixing, and comparisons to other women.

Aside from comparisons to women in general, the comparison reference group also greatly impacted how women felt about their bodies. A majority of the women, such as Esther, reported instances of upward social comparisons, whereby they evaluated their own bodies in reference to a woman who seemed more desirable, attractive, or confident than themselves.

I went to Towson a few weeks ago to visit one of my friends, and she's the ideal woman, like she's blonde, she has blue eyes, and she's skinny but she also has curves, so being around her made me self-conscious, 'cause she basically had everything.

These comparisons often resulted in increased body image dissatisfaction but also a degree of envy, awe, and appreciation for others' beauty. A few women (n=3) reported actively engaging in healthier body image comparisons that were less self-deprecating in nature and less likely to be personalized to their own appearance. For example, Lin illustrates this phenomenon:

Mostly I think, "Oh wow, she's really pretty. I wish I was this pretty." But also like, I'm glad for her that she's pretty and I hope she's happy with herself.

Most women (n= 11) reported comparing their bodies to other Asian women due to "genetic factors" that make it seem like it "would be a waste of time for [them] to try to compare [themselves] to other people" (Chrissie). Given the underrepresentation of Asian models in the media, coupled with the idealization of White beauty in America, many women felt obligated to compare themselves to other Asian peers as a protective strategy against feeling worse about their bodies. These women also questioned the usefulness in comparing to White women because society categorizes them based upon race and automatically compares them to other Asian women. Yet sometimes comparisons to other Asian women would heighten awareness of body image concerns, particularly in feeling fatter (Jacqueline) or curvier (Lin) than other Asian same-sex

peers. It seems women were often in a double-bind where comparisons to White women can fuel body shame but comparisons to other Asian peers were not always protective as exemplified with Min:

But I think even now I have issues with body image. Because I am in an Asian sorority it's really easy to see a lot of other Asian girls and sort of the ideal is still the same, like very slim, very small. That's the sort of thing that they want you to be and I would say like I'm really slim and pretty small but I'm not like super skinny. I'm not as skinny as I know a lot of my friends are.

In contrast to feedback from female peers, many women expressed ambivalence about feedback from male peers and expressed that their feelings were contingent on the context in which it is received. In more sexualized domains (e.g. bars), women, such as Adeline, reported desiring to impress men and wishing for compliments or approval about their appearance.

I think that with men, I definitely try to check up on my appearance more because I want to be attractive to them, I guess. I definitely would want to look better to them versus if I'm just going to hang out with some girlfriends, it's not really a big deal. I can look like a bum.

Yet simultaneously these women also reported feeling more evaluated, uncomfortable, and exposed in these contexts because the feedback sexually objectified their bodies thereby making it appear more threatening. This is illustrated by Esther:

I don't know, I think kind of depends on the guy, like if they're my friends, I don't feel judged but if it's someone I don't know, like a stranger, I feel objectified in a way.

The inherent power differentials between men and women also made it difficult for women to feel they could negotiate, challenge, or dispute the feedback. Unlike feedback from women, feedback from male peers, while acceptable in desexualized contexts (e.g. dorm room with friends), was more precarious and unwelcome in sexualized domains, as illustrated by Elaine:

I don't know if some guy came up to me at a bar and was just like hey, you're really beautiful--and it has happened, and I'm just like thanks...and then I just tend to leave. I don't know it's just weird I find like other approaches to talking to me works a lot better than just flat out saying oh you're gorgeous or whatever.

Another woman, Fatima, self-identified as bisexual, and did not express the same uneasy feelings around male peers because of her ability to code-switch and identify as more masculine in these contexts. Importantly, while women engage in many strategies to monitor and manage their body image beliefs, a majority of women appeared to feel “constantly under scrutiny” (Chrissie) from both male and female peers.

Domain Three: Identity Formation Processes

Many women also described their process of identity formation, which often either enhanced or hindered their ability to navigate multiple minority stressors and interpersonal and contextual difficulties. We identified two subgroups of women with distinct identity formation processes: a) integrated identity acceptance (e.g. women with a sense of positive regard about identities and ability to integrate multiple identity statuses into a unified self-image) and b) disintegrated identity depreciation (e.g. women with a negative regard about identity(s) and difficulty integrating multiple identity statuses into unified self-image).

Category 1. Integrated identity appreciation. Some women (n=5) possessed heightened senses of self-appreciation, self-respect, and critical consciousness that served as protective buffers against minority stressors (e.g. experiences of racism, sexism). Regardless of their multiple marginalized identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation), their unwavering self-compassion and acceptance promoted a sense of individuality and self-efficacy to navigate experiences that could increase body dissatisfaction, such as family body criticism. These women often discussed the racial socialization processes in

their family whereby their parents would explain racial inequalities, express pride in their heritage, and explore tactics (e.g. code-switching) for coping with stereotypes and narrow expectations in their communities. Many of these women were also surrounded by feminist female family members who imbued the importance of self-confidence and authenticity, while deemphasizing the salience of physical appearance and comparisons to peers. The messages learned from family members and feminist role models were often internalized by women and used to challenge restrictive beauty standards and increase body acceptance. These women also expressed a level of resourcefulness and agency in crafting a personal definition of what it means to be an Asian American woman. For instance, Sunita shared how her mother's support and encouragement helped her navigate pressures from her Indian relatives to adhere to more conservative practices:

I guess like growing up my mom was like really supportive of me and like whatever I wanted to do so I guess I sort of took that mindset to, I don't know, to try. Like I'm not going to let what other people feel I should do influence my decision.

She described a sense of freedom to make her own decisions and an understanding that her identity as an Indian woman can be fluid and crafted in way that promotes belonging without negating other aspects of who she is. Sunita shared "feeling comfortable" with her appearance and uninterested in putting effort into her appearance simply to appease men. Similarly, Jenny and Fatima described their journeys of integrating multiple racial backgrounds into a cohesive identity, which in turn encouraged more acceptance of their racially ambiguous features and body shape and size. Fatima's sense of pride in her identities as a multi-racial, bisexual woman and confidence helped her sustain a positive body image and restrain from comparisons:

I don't really think I find myself looking at beauty norms because I mean those people who you see like those people are very rare. Like not everyone is going to look like that.

So you can't expect to look like that. So then what's the point of comparing yourself to them?

Sana discussed the protective role of her Muslim religious affiliation that promoted greater appreciation and self-respect for her body. Moreover, Indra disclosed her process of self-reflection and self-growth (e.g. "Am I Indian? Am I American? Am I both?") that promoted a unique appreciation for and synthesis of her multiple cultural identities. Collectively these women possessed higher body image ratings, more flexible, affirming body-image beliefs, and devoted less effort into appearance fixing and maintenance.

Category 2. Disintegrated identity depreciation. Unlike women with integrated identities and a sense of self-appreciation, other women (n=5) expressed less self-acceptance and more difficulty functioning in multiple cultural contexts without compromising their racial or gender identity. These women seemed to be in a different stage of racial and gender identity development; they did not seem to possess the same resiliency in coping with their multiple marginalized identities and this in turn may be reflected in more negative body image beliefs. These women often described feeling like a "third culture kid" (Chrissie) whereby they felt a lack of belonging in both their host culture and American culture, with some women immersing themselves more fully in Western culture by dating White men or by socializing with White peers. At times this resulted in idealization of White features (e.g. curvy features, blue eyes) and heightened self-criticism, which was reflected in lower global body self-esteem. Additionally, Jacqueline shared the traditional gender role expectations of Vietnamese women "clash" with American culture and her wish to rebel against expectations to be a "model daughter." She described lacking confidence in her appearance and exposure to cultural

practices in Vietnam to “cover up flaws,” which contributed to her consideration of plastic surgery.

Many of these women also expressed the unique developmental challenges that arose when transitioning to college, particularly in experiencing racism for the first time. These women often described being “on-guard” (Chrissie) and hyper-vigilant about their outward appearance and experienced difficulty fully embracing their Asian identity or described a fragmented sense of self, whereby one or more identities were concealed or depreciated. Additionally, many women discussed the “generation gap” (Chrissie) in their family contexts as a barrier to emotional connection and support. For instance, Jacqueline described an overwhelming obligation to care for her family due to “cultural” and “language barriers,” which resulted in her navigating difficult situations alone. This is particularly salient for Arpana who is diagnosed with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), which contributed to hair loss, weight gain, and acne. She described disconnecting from her Bengali community at school, the lack of openness in her family, exposure to race-related teasing, and a pressure to be the “perfect daughter.” Her experience with multiple minority-status stressors across locations of gender, race, and disability contributed to heightened self-denigration and self-objectification. Importantly, experiences of oppression, coupled with negative evaluations of their social identities and feelings of exclusion and isolation, made it harder for women to develop the sense of self-validation and acceptance that can be used to critically challenge restrictive beauty ideals or promote body image acceptance.

Body Image Management Strategies

All women reported a range of coping strategies to increase body image satisfaction, confidence, and self-worth. The most common strategies employed by all women included a) *body appreciation*—admiration and appreciation for diverse beauty representations and body capabilities, b) *body acceptance*—genuine acceptance and respect for all aspects of one's body, c) *cognitive restructuring*—identification and reframing of self-defeating distortions and beliefs about one's body, d) *positive role models*—facilitating empowering, supportive, and caring relationships from a strengths-based, holistic framework and e) *investment in appearance*—internalizing positive and negative feedback as motivation to improve appearance. See Table 3.

Women with higher self-reported body image ratings often employed numerous strategies depending on the context, such as actively disputing or gathering evidence to disconfirm body criticisms from family members, searching for positive, realistic and ethnically-similar media representations, and affirming attractive body image features. These women also seemed more critical of idealistic cultural beauty standards and were less willing to internalize and accept negative feedback about their bodies from others. Due to their assortment of coping skills, these women were more able to resourcefully and resiliently navigate interpersonal body image stressors, which in turn enabled them to deemphasize appearance as a determinant of self-worth. On the other hand, women with lower body image ratings often struggled to accept body image imperfections, experienced more helplessness and powerlessness to challenge restrictive media images, and struggled to discredit negative feedback about their bodies.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The current study advances the scant body of research on Asian American women's body image by proposing a model for understanding the prominent sociocultural etiological factors that may attenuate or heighten risk for body image concerns. We assert that exploring how gender and race mutually inform one another and shape life experiences can permit a more comprehensive understanding of Asian American women's body images. More specifically, the experiences of oppression at the intersections of gender and race may create unique sources of strain that differentially influence body image for Asian American women compared to women of other racial groups. Given the majority of studies do not examine how race-related variables (e.g. racism, race-related teasing) influence body image dissatisfaction among women of color (Brown, Cachelin, & Dohm, 2009), this study extends the literature by exploring the role of both racism and sexism in shaping body image beliefs. Moreover, this study challenges the predominant misunderstanding of body image as a stable phenomenon by exploring women's fluid body image beliefs in social contexts of power and inequality. Rather than impose pre-existing theories validated among White women (Thompson & Stice, 2001) and Black women (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014), the grounded theory approach used in this study enabled the generation of a new model of body image based upon Asian American women's subjective and lived realities.

Asian American women's body image beliefs and experiences were both positively and negatively influenced by a range of Contextual (i.e. navigating cultural beauty norms, experiences of sexism and racism), Interpersonal (i.e. parental and peer influences), and Identity (i.e. integrated identity appreciation, dissonant identity

depreciation) domains. See Figure 1. We found that women's body image narratives were contextualized within numerous systems of oppression at institutional, interpersonal, and individual levels. Women noted navigating a) White aesthetic beauty ideals and racialized expectations that normalize all Asian women's bodies as thin, b) experiences of sexual objectification, including exotification of Asian women's bodies and unwanted sexual advances, c) racism, including race-related teasing and microaggressions, d) unsolicited parental body criticism, and e) objectification from same-sex peers, all of which contributed to heightened body surveillance and shame. Despite these harmful impacts, all women described numerous coping strategies to alleviate body image concerns. These body image management strategies included creating an individualized appearance, accepting the body in spite of flaws, focusing on positive traits, forming empowering relationships, and putting effort into one's appearance. These strategies not only attenuated body image dissatisfaction but also helped women navigate and overcome contextual and interpersonal stressors. In the following sections we review the main findings in light of the original research questions proposed.

Perceptions of Body Image

Asian American women's body images were comprised of self and other perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about body structure, facial features, and skin complexion/tone. Consistent with prior conceptualizations of body image (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990; Cash et al., 2004), women described the multifaceted nature of their body images that were constructed and managed based upon evaluations from self, important others (e.g. parents, romantic partners, peers) and society (e.g. media). However, unlike preconceived notions that weight and desire for thinness represent the

most salient body image concerns, the present findings suggest that specific racialized features, such as eye shape, greatly impacted how women perceived their bodies. These findings are supported by some quantitative studies (Forbes & Frederick, 2008; Frederick, Kelly, Latner, Sandhu, & Tsong, 2016) that suggest Asian American women are substantially more dissatisfied with racialized physical characteristics (e.g. face shape, eye size, skin tone) compared to White women. Collectively, these findings highlight that racially-salient physical features appear to play an important role in appearance evaluation for Asian American women.

Body Image Influenced by Gender and Race

Contextual conditions. Women frequently described the role of broad contextual conditions (Domain 1) in perpetuating hierarchies of beauty and unattainable beauty ideals. These women shared their experiences navigating Western-based sociocultural risk factors (e.g. internalization of thin ideal) and oppression related to their minority statuses (e.g. White aesthetic body ideals). Although women described a normalized pressure to be thin across races, they shared receiving unique racialized messages that Asian women are expected to be thin. Asian American women thereby experience unique conflict in being considered “fatter” than other Asian women while striving to meet Western curvaceous features. While women described the futility of attempting to adhere to Western beauty standards because of biological differences in genetic make-up, they also expressed that particular White features, such as breast size and skin tone, are revered and privileged in society. For some women, the unattainable nature of these features promoted a sense of powerlessness and self-criticism that perpetuated body shame and denigration of racialized features. Many women also discussed their desire to

possess features that were uncommon, distinct, or unique compared to other Asian women, such as having double-eye lids or being tall. This may reflect a desire to individuate from other Asian women in response to racist assumptions that all Asian women look the same and may not simply reflect a desire to adhere to Western beauty norms. Given the novelty of this finding in the body image research, more research should explore the role of internalized racism and Asian cultural beauty ideals and media representations of women that may influence perceptions of attractiveness.

Asian American women also shared contending with experiences of both sexism and racism that contributed to feeling invisible, infantilized, or objectified. While prior studies have examined the harmful impacts of the exoticification of Asian women's bodies (Kim, Seo, & Baek, 2014; Sue et al., 2007), this study advances the literature by exploring unique experiences of sexual objectification (Asian American women being perceived as doll-like, child-like, exotic objects of desire, and experiencing unwanted sexual advances) across ethnic backgrounds that contribute to increased body surveillance and shame. Women also discussed additional experiences of misogyny that manifested in derogatory remarks about their appearance, such as being told one's eyes were chinky. These results coincide with prior quantitative studies that found racial/ethnic teasing was significantly associated with body image concerns, weight-control behavior, and lower body esteem among South Asian women (Iyer & Haslam, 2003; Reddy & Crowther, 2007). Additionally, a majority of women across ethnic backgrounds described receiving racial microaggressions as an Asian individual (e.g. stereotyped as a perpetual foreigner, housewife, good at math) that were associated with a loss of individuality and increased self-objectification. Given researchers have underexplored the

role of perceived discrimination and race-related teasing in shaping Asian American women's body dissatisfaction (Cheng, 2014), it is essential that future studies continue to explore the joint experiences of racism and sexism that negatively impact appearance beliefs.

Interpersonal influences. In addition to traversing structural and environmental conditions, women in this study also reported the salience of interpersonal influences in contributing to body image concerns (Domain 2), particularly family body criticism and peer feedback. Many participants described instances of hurtful, blunt, unsolicited body criticism from family members about weight gain, weight loss, or skin complexion. These experiences often heightened self-criticism and awareness of disliked features. Although many women expressed comments about their body were unwanted, a few women described family body criticism as a normal cultural practice that is reflective of a desire for the children to present well to others and as a way to express love and affection. It is possible that due to differences in cultural styles of communication (Smart et al., 2011) and a desire to respect elders, that women did not dispute or contest this feedback. While these findings coincide with other notable empirical studies (Isano, Watkins, & Lian, 2009; Smart & Tsong, 2014; Ting & Hwang, 2007), this study extends the literature by describing how family body criticism intersects with the quality of family dynamics. Women who reported expectations of perfectionism in their families, and who had more intergenerational family conflict, were more likely to internalize instances of family body criticism and feel worse about their bodies. This partly aligns with another study that found that expectations of perfectionism in the family were associated with heightened self-criticism and preoccupation with appearance (Frederick

et al., 2016). Given Asian American women may have an interdependent construal of self, such that their sense of self is connected to a belongingness with others, they may experience greater strain because their appearance reflects not only on themselves but also on their families. Future studies should continue to investigate collectivistic cultural values and their role in shaping body image beliefs.

In addition to familial influences, women also recounted multiple instances of receiving compliments, from mostly female Asian peers, about their thinness, daintiness, and small breast size. Women described that compliments were often given in a self-deprecating manner and were hard to internalize and accept, in part as a way to preserve modesty and group harmony. It is also possible that feedback from female peers resulted in an increased awareness of disliked body features, which can intensify body monitoring and surveillance. During these instances women often described feeling exposed and vulnerable, which fueled further body image comparisons to Asian peers who were often more physically desirable and petite. This upward social comparison feedback loop, wherein feedback motivates further appearance checking and comparisons which probes further feedback, intensified body shame. This finding is similar to the study by Smart and Tsong (2014) such that body dissatisfaction increased when comparing to ethnically similar peers, suggesting that Asian American women might have even stricter standards of thinness compared to women of other racial groups. Although the harmful consequences of body image comparisons, particularly to those considered more attractive, are well-acknowledged in the literature, less is known about the role of compliments on appearance-related beliefs and self-monitoring. Given the perceived negative impact of compliments on body image among Asian American women, future

research should continue to examine how same-sex peer feedback might intensify self-objectification.

Identity formation processes. The final domain, identity formation (Domain 3), described women's positive or negative regard about their identities and the integration of these identities as moderators of body image dissatisfaction. We identified small subgroups of women who possessed either integrated identity appreciation, which buffered against sociocultural factors that predispose risk for negative body image, or women who possessed disintegrated identity depreciation, which intensified responses to contextual and interpersonal stressors and increased negative body image. The findings of this domain advance the literature by examining new identity-based constructs, aside from ethnic identity and racial identity, that indirectly influence body image among Asian American women. Women with disintegrated identity depreciation reported feeling less affirmed in their identities and were subsequently more self-critical and hyper-vigilant about their outward appearance to others. They discussed the difficulty of navigating minority stressors independently, particularly when they lacked supportive and emotionally available parents who modeled how to cope with race-related distress. Previous literature has suggested that protective and proactive socialization messages transmitted in the family, such as promoting cultural pride, can promote resilience and resourcefulness in overcoming race-related stressors (Hughes et al., 2006, Stevenson, 1994). The unique stressors of these women across identities of gender, race, and disability, coupled with limited protective racial socialization messages, might have played a role in women feeling isolated, different, exoticized, and unattractive. It is also possible that these women experienced heightened levels of bicultural stress, or

difficulty integrating and balancing multiple salient cultural identities, that increased risk for body image dissatisfaction (Tsong & Smart, 2015).

Body Image Management Strategies

While previous literature has asserted that women with a greater degree of body-size acceptance, sense of connection, and more flexible appearance ideals experience more body image acceptance (see Tiggemann, 2015 for review), less is known about the positive body image experiences and sources of resiliency among Asian American women. Moreover, no known studies to date investigate how self-appreciation and a unified self-image may protect women from sociocultural factors that heighten risk for body image dissatisfaction. We identified a novel identity construct, namely integrated identity appreciation, among a sub-group of women that protected women from experiencing more negative body image beliefs. These women possessed positive regard about their multiple identities and self-appreciation for their uniqueness and individuality. Compared to other women in our sample, these women exhibited more resilience in navigating minority-related stressors and pressures to adhere to idealistic beauty standards and in turn were more likely to resist body image comparisons and deemphasize the importance of appearance. These women described the importance of feminist role models and the racial socialization processes in their families that increased their critical consciousness and encouraged the development of a personal definition of beauty as an Asian American woman. Interestingly, a few of these women held mixed racial backgrounds, which might permit greater flexibility in ascribing to multiple cultural beauty norms because of their racially ambiguous features. Additionally, two of the women described an appreciation and acceptance of other aspects of their cultural

identities (e.g. Islam's code of modesty, bisexual orientation), in helping to shield themselves from the male gaze. The findings of this study advance the literature by examining how integrated identity appreciation, in promoting acceptance, fulfillment, connection and individuation, can promote positive body image.

We also identified coping strategies employed by all women to combat restrictive cultural beauty expectations, experiences of sexism and racism, familial body criticism, and upward body comparisons. Consistent with prior conceptualizations of positive body image (Tylka & Barcalow, 2015), women in our sample described appreciating the uniqueness of their body and valuing the functionality of their bodies, accepting their bodily imperfections, discounting negative feedback from others, creating empowering relationships with others who share positive body image views, and investing effort into appearance to feel attractive. Future studies should continue to explore how positive body image is expressed among Asian American women, such as through less self-consciousness, less intensive grooming efforts, or vigilance about weight, and how this may or may not be different compared to women of other racial groups.

Conclusions

The results of the present study underscore the importance of investigating meaningful sociocultural factors, in contexts of sexism and racism, to understand the complexity of body image concerns among Asian American women. The findings advance etiological understanding of prominent risk and protective factors of body image concerns in several ways. Foremost, while perceived racial discrimination has been theorized as a risk factor for women of color (Cummins & Lehman, 2007), few studies empirically investigate the role of race-related distress in predicting body shame and

discontent among Asian American women. Given Asian American women in this study disclosed numerous instances of race-related teasing and microaggressions, as well as racial socialization coping messages in their families, it is imperative to continue to explore how stress and trauma shape body image beliefs. Secondly, this study examined within-group differences at multiple locations of identity and the meaning of these identities in various social contexts (e.g. female comparisons, feedback from family, media exposure). Most studies to date obscure the complexity of body image experiences among Asian American women by aggregating findings or exploring race and gender as separate constructs. By giving voice to women's lived realities within an intersectional framework, this study adds more nuance and context that can be used to enhance understanding of meaningful contextual factors that shape body image concerns. Future studies should investigate how other identities, such as sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and disability status, intersect with gender and race to produce distinct body image beliefs. It would also be beneficial to explore how women with mixed racial backgrounds navigate variant standards of attractiveness. Lastly, this study illuminated several cultural values and conflicts (e.g. intergenerational family conflict, family body criticism, perfectionism) that may be particularly salient for Asian American women born in the United States. Future studies therefore should continue to examine the role of generational status in influencing intergenerational conflict, differences in cultural communication styles, and bicultural stress and their collective role in contributing to body image dissatisfaction.

Limitations and Recommendations

The results of this qualitative study should be interpreted in light of several limitations that may hinder the generalizability of the findings. Although the women offered insightful, thoughtful, and honest accounts of their body image and life histories, it would be remiss to assume this study captured the true complexity of how all Asian American women perceive and relate to their bodies. Additionally, all of the participants were well-educated college students. Therefore some of their privileged identities (e.g. education, socioeconomic status) might not reflect the extent of oppressive experiences that other Asian American women endure. Moreover, the authors were not able to detect any identifiable differences in body image stressors, beauty norms, or body image beliefs across ethnicities. Although previous literature has contended that women of South Asian descent might be protected from body image concerns (Cummins et al., 2005), our findings do not confirm this conception. It would be an overstatement to assume women of South Asian descent do not experience distinct stressors or endorse distinct standards of attractiveness. The small sample of South Asian women might have obscured the complexity of their body image experiences; future studies should continue to investigate both the heterogeneity and homogeneity of body image beliefs across ethnic backgrounds. It is also possible that the sampling techniques generated women whose body image experiences were especially memorable, or influential, which may over-exaggerate the salience of body image experiences for all women. Given the lead researcher is White, it is probable that the participants felt less comfortable to divulge topics related to racism, privilege, and oppression as a way to save face and maintain connectedness and harmony. The transcribed narratives therefore may only present a

partial picture of how these sociocultural factors contribute to their dynamic body image experiences. Lastly, it is also difficult to determine directionality of influence as exposure to sexism, racism, and heterosexism may heighten risk for body image concerns or it is likely that body image concerns may make these women more sensitively aware of potential disparities and lack of belonging.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study can advance etiological understanding of prominent sociocultural factors that may attenuate or heighten risk for body image concerns among an understudied group, Asian American women. Given Asian American women are assumed to be protected from body image concerns, due to their smaller physiques and the perpetuation of the model minority stereotype, clinicians may minimize the severity of body image disturbances for this population. The results of this study reiterate the importance of using culturally-validated assessments and techniques to capture beliefs and feelings about salient features that are not captured in the present body image measures. Clinicians working with Asian American women would want to explore perceptions about skin tone, eye shape, and breast size in addition to beliefs about weight and size. Moreover, clinicians should challenge assumptions that acculturation to the dominant culture or stronger ethnic identification are inherently protective strategies for coping with White aesthetic beauty ideals. Rather, it would be more helpful to examine bicultural stress, intergenerational conflict, and racial-ethnic coping strategies to better understand body image concerns as responses to racism and stress. For example, clinicians could inquire about differences in family communication style or messages they retained about how to cope with racism and sexism. Additionally, clinicians could incorporate psychoeducational interventions about various proactive and

protective coping strategies, explore internalized messages about gender and race, and identify sources of resourcefulness and resiliency. Collectively, this could empower Asian American women to understand the cultural institutions and systems of oppression that maintain body image concerns and encourage the development of more flexible, affirming body image beliefs that are advantageous to their overall sense of identity.

Appendix A

Over the past few decades there has been a burgeoning interest in understanding body image, and particularly body dissatisfaction, among women and girls (Pruzinsky & Cash, 2002). Body image is a multidimensional concept that encompasses attitudes, cognitions, personality, and perceptual aspects of how an individual relates to his or her own body (Kolb, 1989) and is usually conceptualized as a stable, trait-level characteristic (Cash, 1990; Rudiger, Cash, Roehrig, & Thompson, 2007). It typically refers to the way individuals perceive their bodies, regardless of their actual shape and size, as well as how they feel about their body (Capodilupo & Forsyth, 2014). Unlike eating disorder conceptualizations, which impart a negative connotation, body image can represent a continuum of both positive and harmful beliefs and attitudes. Recent empirical investigations, however, tend to examine an array of body dissatisfaction experiences (e.g. body shame, dietary restraint) in part because they place women's health at risk.

While body image plays a critical role in the development of eating disorders, its influence extends to other health outcomes that disproportionately affect women. As a component of mental health, body dissatisfaction has been consistently associated with other health-compromising concerns, such as low self-esteem (Koff, Benavage, & Wong, 2001), depression (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Johnson & Wardle, 2005) and lower levels of self- acceptance and autonomy (McKinley, 2002). College-aged women in particular may be especially likely to endorse negative comments about their body shape or size (Britton Martz, Bazzini, Curin, & LeaShomb, 2006), and some emerging evidence suggests college students who engage in weight-control behaviors may be more prone to experience harmful substance use consequences (Giles et al., 2009). Yet despite the

public health significance of body image concerns, women of color are disproportionately underrepresented in the literature.

White, upper-class, heterosexual women have historically been overrepresented in clinical and non-clinical examinations of body image concerns and eating disorders (Mastria, 2002; Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2001). While more recent literature has challenged the cultural-boundedness of body dissatisfaction (Cheney, 2011; Nasser, Katzman, & Gordon, 2001; Wildes, Emory, & Simons, 2001), there has been very little attention devoted to understanding ethnic minority women's body image experience outside of theories tested with White women (Bordo, 2009). For instance prominent sociocultural theories often examine women's exposure to pervasive media messages that depict unrealistic beauty standards and ideals, yet neglect to consider ethnic minority women's unique sociocultural context that accounts for their eating practices, body image perceptions, and self-evaluations (Talleyrand, 2012). Traditional empirically-supported eating disorder models that focus on caloric restriction, drive for thinness, and restraint, may therefore be too limiting to adequately capture the complexity of contextual experiences for women of color. Since women of color are often subject to different standards of beauty, and may be exposed to distinct sociocultural stressors that influence their beliefs about appearance and attractiveness, it is essential to understand the sociocultural factors that might heighten risk for specific racial groups.

One racial group that warrants further investigation is Asian American women. Compared to other racial groups, Asian American women are often underrepresented in the body image literature (Nichter, 2000). There are several plausible reasons for the relative exclusion of Asian American women, and perhaps lack of advancement of

theoretical models that depict body image correlates for this population, which can be broadly delineated under two categories: the model minority myth and methodological limitations. While these speculations are tentative, it serves as an additional reminder of the importance of critically evaluating the current body image literature to encompass more culturally-conscious variables to understand women's intersecting identities.

Stereotypes such as the model minority myth, where Asian Americans are assumed to be successful regardless of conditions placed upon them, propagate the belief that Asian American women are protected from body image concerns (Yokoyama, 2008). Many Americans wrongly assume Asian Americans do not encounter discrimination, or that they experience discrimination to a lesser extent, compared to other minority groups (Lee, 2003). And yet others view Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners (Liang, Nathwani, Ahmad, & Prince, 2010) regardless of citizenship. The model minority stereotype can pressure Asian American women to maintain a façade of morality and promote denial of problems, such as body image concerns. Although research evidence consistently confirms the debilitating health effects of racism, oppression, and discrimination on Asian American populations (Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2000), the body image experiences of Asian American women have only recently received attention. The dearth of research may be related to Asian American women's a) minimal disclosure of negative feelings about their bodies because it may challenge normative cultural expressions of distress (Kawamura, 2002; Mukai, Kambura, & Sasaki, 1998); b) perceived immunity from body dissatisfaction because of their relatively petite stature (Cheng, 2014); or c) low help-seeking behaviors more generally (Nicado et al., 2007).

This disparity may hinder understanding of critical determinants of body image concerns as well as culturally-sensitive treatment interventions.

Methodological limitations may also be responsible for the relative omission of Asian American women's body image experiences and the limited consensus of etiological correlates for this population. Prior studies have been criticized for their small sample sizes, use of measures not validated for Asian Americans, and varying definitions of eating disorders (Cummins, Simmons, & Zane, 2005). Another criticism concerns the use of benchmark comparisons between two or more ethnically diverse women and White women which minimizes the unique sociocultural context for ethnic minorities and neglects to honor diverse expressions of attractiveness, such as skin tone (Cash, Morrow, Hrabosky & Perry, 2004). Particular groups of Asian American women also tend to escape scrutiny, such as women of South Asian backgrounds (Iyer & Haslam, 2003), and many studies do not differentiate between women of different cultural backgrounds by aggregating findings (Reddy & Crowther, 2007). By negating the cultural, historical, and political context of individual women, important cultural distinctions and correlates of body image concerns are often overgeneralized and inconsistent.

The few studies that do exist offer contradictory findings making it difficult to isolate specific risk or protective factors that may influence body image beliefs and attitudes. For instance, some studies suggest White and Asian women do not differ significantly in their levels of body dissatisfaction (Gluck & Geliebter, 2002; Grabe & Hyde, 2006). In fact, Wildes and colleagues (2001) found that Asian American women actually report more eating concerns than White women. Other emerging research suggests there is a growing trend among Asian American women to aspire to the Western

“thin ideal” (Luo, Parish, & Laumann, 2005) and that they may actually have *thinner* body ideals compared to White women (Barnett, Keel, & Conoscenti, 2001). Additionally findings report Asian American women were more likely to be dissatisfied with specific body parts, such as breast size (Forbes & Frederick, 2008) and eyelids (Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999). Yet other studies purport that Asian American women experience less body image dissatisfaction (Nouri, Hill, & Orrell-Valente, 2011) and are less likely to engage in purging behaviors (Crago & Shisslak, 2003). In one detailed review, Cummins and colleagues (2005) investigated national differences in eating disorders in Asia and discovered a very low prevalence of diagnosable eating disorders have been found in Pakistan and that individuals in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan may experience more risk. This mirrors other research that suggests Westernized countries with higher incomes may have elevated rates of body image concerns (Lee & Katzman, 2002); yet this view often oversimplifies women’s diverse cultural practices, acculturation levels, and family values that may shape body image beliefs. Regardless of the discrepant findings, this research collectively challenges the misconceived notion that body image concerns are simply a “White girl phenomenon” (Mastria, 2002). Research evidence suggests Asian American women experience body image concerns, which makes it increasingly important to extend the literature beyond prevalence rates to gain a deeper understanding of body image beliefs and beauty norms in light of meaningful and culturally-salient contextual factors.

Sociocultural Determinants of Body Image

A few researchers have attempted to synthesize the broad sociocultural determinants of body image concerns in the context of Asian women’s intersecting and

interdependent identities. This intersectionality framework seeks to make visible the systemic role structural inequalities play in shaping Asian American women's perceptions, access to resources, and outcomes (Cole, 2009). It also emphasizes both the uniqueness and shared similarities of Asian American women's body image experiences across their occupation of multiple social categories. Joining this intersectionality perspective with social identity theory principles (Shields, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), wherein individual's belonging and self-esteem are tied to group membership, can highlight the ways social positions and systems of hierarchy dynamically influence women's fluid identities and body image concerns. The following sections will examine the shared impact of Asian American women's femininity, racial, and ethnic identities on their shifting body image perceptions and beliefs of attractiveness.

Femininity

Current feminist theories have recognized the social meaning of women's body experiences as reflective of both gendered and broader systematic power relations (McKinley, 2011). This perspective acknowledges that the body often serves as a source of control for women and women must seek to attain restrictive beauty standards, mask inferior or less attractive body parts, and persistently survey their bodies. Rather than pathologizing individual women's body image dissatisfaction, this feminist framework considers the intricacies of women's social context that leave them vulnerable to objectification and shame (McKinley, 2002). Before reviewing the current literature on femininity and Asian American women more specifically as it relates to body image, the next few sections will provide a broad conceptual overview of femininity and its cultural nuances.

Femininity, as a component of gender identity, describes the attributes, behaviors, roles, and expectations of what it means to be a woman and often acts as a prescriptive guide for how women should think, feel, and act (Mahalik et al., 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As with many other social learning processes, gendered behaviors are often maintained through modeling and reinforcement (Addis & Cohane, 2005) which encourage women to regulate their behavior to conform to the cultural definitions of femininity (Bem, 1981). Gender theorists often conceptualize femininity as performative and variable in nature, as women engage in certain behaviors that are considered appropriate and expected from their social groups (Butler, 1990;). Yet often times, Western-based definitions of femininity, exemplified by race (e.g. White), class (e.g. high socioeconomic status), endorsement of traditional feminine traits (e.g. domesticity, nurturance), and sexuality (e.g. heterosexual), are considered normative benchmarks for which all other diverse expressions of femininity are compared (Cole, 2009). These cultural definitions of femininity thus do not necessarily reflect individual differences (Smiler & Epstein, 2010) but may influence individual behavior. This has important implications for how Asian American women understand and attach meaning to their experience of being a woman as they may adapt or alter aspects of their feminine presentation to acquiesce expectations or avoid social retribution.

Numerous feminist researchers have examined how women's bodies are watched and evaluated in terms of their fit with unattainable cultural beauty standards. This disciplinary gaze reinforces the notion that women's bodies are always visible and available for judgment and that in order to minimize criticism women should engage in habitual self-monitoring (McKinley, 2002; Spitzack, 1990). The persistent external

pressure to engage in body surveillance practices can lead women to connect the achievement of these unrealistic standards with their sense of self-worth. Women's bodies are often seen as deficient and deviant compared to male bodies, which can serve to maintain gendered power relations. Yet despite recommendations to incorporate more ethnically diverse perspectives into these theoretical models (Moradi & Huang, 2008), very few researchers empirically investigate how body surveillance can mark racialized body images as deficient to White bodies (McKinley, 2011). By understanding how Asian American women assign meaning to their body image experiences in relation to White women's bodies, research can underscore the salience of context and systems of hierarchy that may shape body image beliefs.

While more research literature is needed to clarify the relationship between body shame and objectification for Asian American women, there is evidence to suggest that Asian American women can be expected to fulfill constraining feminine stereotypes. Some particular ethnic groups of Asian women are subject to a number of offensive and degrading stereotypes (e.g. subservient, docile, hyper-feminine, exotic) which can have a profound impact on their sense of identity, competence, and self-concept (Espiritu, 1997; Sue et al., 2007; Tajima, 1989). Other researchers contend that there are particular feminine-oriented commonalities across Asian cultures that may predispose risk for body image concerns, such as adherence to a more rigidly defined social hierarchy and a desire for social approval (Kawamura, 2002). These qualities are often contrasted with the view of White women as confident, self-assured, and assertive (Liang et al., 2011). These stereotypes are not only neglect to capture the complexity of experiences for Asian

American women but also associate Asian American women with less privileged characteristics that may perpetuate their oppression.

It appears Asian American women may experience unique pressure to evaluate their bodies in response to cultural standards of attractiveness while simultaneously evaluating their femininity in response to narrow gender scripts and stereotypes. These women may experience heightened levels of gender conflict in attempting to navigate these restrictive gender roles, particularly when their bodies may be considered inferior or less attractive than traditional White notions of femininity. In this sense, Asian American women's femininity is racialized and is reflective of broader systems of hierarchy that may seek to devalue certain body images and types. Asian American women may respond to these power relations by engaging in impression management techniques whereby they adjust their physical appearance, adopt different beauty standards, and shift their body image beliefs as a means of securing belonging (Cheney, 2011). A qualitative study by Pyke and Johnson (2003) mirrors this phenomenon. The researchers sampled second-generation daughters of both Korean and Vietnamese immigrants ($N=100$) and discovered Asian American in certain contexts women felt a pressure to comply with caricatured notions of Asian definitions of femininity, such as being quiet, withholding, and passive, or conversely desired to endorse "White" traits, such as assertiveness and loudness, to distance oneself from these derogatory messages. The results of this study suggest Asian American women can intentionally suppress or exaggerate certain aspects of their femininity depending on their social context. Their adaptation of their gender identity may be a way to claim entitlement to the protections

traditional femininity can afford or to construct unique gender expressions that are typically underrepresented or denigrated in Western culture (Mahalingam & Leu, 2005).

Asian American women may modify their femininity and body image beliefs depending on their context, yet this flexibility and nuance is often missing from the quantitative literature. Moreover, although numerous feminist researchers acknowledge how adherence to feminine norms of thinness or body shame can confer risk for eating pathology (Hurt et al., 2007; Green et al., 2008; Smolak & Murnen, 2008), these studies often aggregate findings across various racial groups and rely on benchmark comparisons between White women and women of color. Additionally, no studies to date examine the potentially empowering and protective role of feminine norms in buffering against other marginalized statuses, which in turn can promote resilience and positive body image experiences. As a result, there is a dearth of literature examining the ways Asian American women understand and perform their femininity in the presence of different gender and ethnic peers and how this might impact their body image beliefs. It is therefore crucial to explore their subjective femininity experiences in light of their cultural worldview and how these ideals, beliefs, and attitudes inform body image experiences.

Racial Identity

Exploring the role of race and racial identity among Asian Americans is crucial for understanding how they cope with and internalize racism. Despite research evidence that dismantles the inaccurate belief that discrimination is not relevant for Asian Americans (Lee, 2003), there is a paucity of literature capturing the racial experiences of Asian American college students (Alvarez, 2002). Yet the cognitive, affective, and

behavioral process that encompasses the formation of an Asian American identity are worthy of study, particularly as various contextual experiences can influence body image perceptions. Exposure to racism can impact how Asian American women feel about their bodies (Cummins & Lehman, 2007) and the racial identity theory framework can provide a tool for understanding how social context and personal identity status influence the process by which body image beliefs are managed.

Racial identity refers to how members of certain racial groups internalize and respond to racism, as well as their collective sense of group identity based upon others' perceptions (Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Helms, 1990). It describes individual strategies for overcoming internalized racism and the manner in which individuals achieve a healthy socio-racial conception of self (Alvarez, 2002). Often times the literature is riddled with conceptual imprecisions whereby researchers use racial identity, ethnic identity, and acculturation interchangeably (Alvarez, 2002). This not only obfuscates understanding of different psychological constructs and processes but also may reflect the misconception that race-related distress may be less severe for Asian Americans. Unlike ethnic identity and acculturation, racial identity focuses more on quality of a person's identification with Asians and Asian Americans as a broad group rather than on identification with specific practices and traditions of more specific ethnic groups (Alvarez, 2002).

Individuals are generally thought to move along a continuum of different racial identity statuses, from "colorblindness" and acknowledgment of inferiority to Whites and White culture to acceptance and appreciation for one's cultural background (Helms, 1995). Psychological well-being is believed to be enhanced as one progresses to more mature statuses that enable conscious racial self-affirmation. Helms (1995) outlined six

statuses for different people of color in the United States: *Conformity* (e.g. minimization of racial dynamics, devaluation of Asian culture), *Dissonance* (e.g. anxiety from heightened racial consciousness), *Immersion* (e.g. idealization of Asian culture, denigration of White culture), *Emersion* (e.g. sense of community with Asian Americans), *Internalization* (e.g. develop personally-meaningful Asian American identity), and *Integrative Awareness* (e.g. sense of identity that joins personal and group definitions and other reference group identities). Individuals are not believed to move linearly along these racial identity statuses; rather they move across various stages depending on life experiences and events, such as exposure to racism (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999). These different levels of racial consciousness influence not only how individuals interact with others but also influences body image perceptions and beliefs about racialized physical features of the body.

Contemporary researchers have examined experiences of stress, discrimination, and racism, coupled with profound beliefs of shame and resentment toward the White majority, as determinants of risk for body image concerns among women of color (Kempa & Thomas, 2000; Striegel-Moore & Smolak, 2000; Watson, Ancis, White, & Nazari, 2013). This theoretical perspective suggests body dissatisfaction and disordered eating may develop in response to racial denigration, oppression, and discriminatory treatment, and that Asian American women's eating problems may be a culturally normative coping strategy for concealing distress and intense emotions (Smart et al., 2011). In this sense, Asian American women may internalize their experiences of perceived racism and discrimination and express distress covertly, because enlisting the help of others is believed to disrupt group harmony. While this theoretical perspective

acknowledges the multiple axes of oppression that both inform and are shaped by women's intersecting identities, few studies have explicitly examined this among Asian American women.

A majority of the studies that have examined racial identity and body image concerns have used African American samples. Generally, theoretical models suggest lower racial identity statuses are related to increased body surveillance and internalization of cultural beauty standards, perhaps because these individuals experience more negative and less affirming attitudes about being Black. Conversely, higher racial identity statuses characterized by more a more accepting, affirming racial identity, can act as a buffer against body image concerns and disordered eating. A few studies have offered support for this conceptualization. For instance, Watson, Ancis, White, and Nazari (2013) found that women ($N= 278$) with lower multiculturally inclusive racial identity attitudes were more likely to internalize dominant Western beauty norms, which in turn was related to body shame, appearance anxiety, and eating disordered behaviors. Another study by Oney, Cole, and Sellers (2011) found that individuals ($N=425$) who felt less positively toward their racial group and who were more dissatisfied with their bodies had the lowest self-esteem. Lastly, a qualitative study by Hesse-Biber and colleagues (2010) mirrors these findings in that some women with elevated levels of Black consciousness reported increased body image satisfaction, perhaps because they have an increased sense of community, pride, and self-esteem in their Black identities. Overall, these results offer confirmatory evidence of the salience of racial identity in influencing body image beliefs.

While only a few researchers have examined racial identity and body image among Asian American women, the few studies that do exist support the aforementioned

conceptual framework. For instance, some studies found the frequency and impact of racial and ethnic teasing intensified body shape concern and maladaptive eating attitudes, perhaps by deepening a sense of self-denigration and shame with their host culture (Iyer & Haslam, 2003; Reddy & Crowther, 2007). The results of a study by Cheng (2014) mirror these findings, as a history of racial/ethnic teasing and perceived discrimination among Asian American college women ($N=587$) was associated with lower self-esteem, greater endorsement of media beauty ideals, and more body dissatisfaction. Moreover, Querimit (2005) found Asian American women ($N=203$) with dissonant racial identities reported less satisfaction with most aspects of their bodies, perhaps because these individuals still believe their bodies are inferior and marginalized even when attempting to conform to Western beauty ideals. Conversely, the results of this study showed that women with an integrated Asian identity, characterized by those who reject forms of oppression by focusing on a shared humanity, reported more body image satisfaction. Additionally, theoretical evidence suggests Asian American women are increasingly targeted in advertisements to correct or alter their racially distinctive features, such as through eyelid, nose, and breast surgeries (Ting & Hwang, 2007). These instances also represent an indirect form of racial oppression and denigration that can heighten negative feelings toward their racial group, which can increase body dissatisfaction. Although more research is needed to clarify these findings, this offers an initial glimpse into the importance of an accepting and affirming racial identity as it may act as a buffer against maladaptive body image beliefs by decreasing body surveillance and denigration of racialized body features.

Ethnic Identity

Eating disorders and body image concerns were previously conceptualized as culturally bound syndromes wherein exposure to Western beauty norms of thinness and idealistic media images would confer risk (Prince, 1985). While there is some support for this perspective, more recent researchers advocate for the examination of culturally-relevant variables (e.g. cultural eating practices and familial attitudes) that are theorized to be more proximal to body image concerns (Cummins et al., 2005). In this sense, body image dissatisfaction is not linked to a specific culture of influence and it is rather reflective of a more complex cultural transition process characterized by distinct sociocultural experiences (Sussman, Truong, Lim, 2007). As such, prominent researchers have begun to examine the role of ethnic identity and acculturation as salient factors related to the development or attenuation of body image concerns among women of color.

Ethnic identity describes an individual's acquisition or retention of cultural characteristics belonging to their ethnic group along with their attitudes toward their ethnic group (Phinney, 1990). Asian American women's ethnic identity often plays a large role in their self-concept as well as their sense of belonging and attachment to their ethnic group. It contributes to a sense of community, self-acceptance, and culture formation and thus has been widely studied in relation to psychological well-being (Nagel, 1994). Much like other forms of identity, ethnic identity can be adapted or altered depending on the context and the salience of that identity at any given moment in time (Yip, 2014). Individuals are believed to move across fluid stages of ethnic identity that can change with exposure to racism and race-related distress. On one end of the

continuum are individuals who have little exposure to the dominant culture and who minimally reflect on their ethnic culture and on the other end are those individuals who have a realistic appraisal of racism and of the strengths and limitations of both dominant and traditional cultures (Phinney, 1990). As evidence suggests ethnic identity can buffer against the effects of discrimination and improve self-esteem and self-confidence (Umaña-Taylor, Wong, Gonzales, & Dumka, 2012), it also may serve as a protective factor against body image concerns.

Some studies suggest stronger levels of ethnic identification can shield women from body image dissatisfaction and disordered eating. For instance, Tsai and colleagues (2003) compared body dissatisfaction among Taiwanese Americans ($N=298$) and Taiwanese women ($N=347$) and found that increased levels of ethnic identification were associated with decreased levels of disordered eating behaviors and body image concerns, but only among the Taiwanese American women. The researchers hypothesized that ethnic identity plays an important role in a multicultural society and can empower Asian American women to challenge Western stereotypic beauty representations and make fewer upward social comparisons (Tsai, Curbow, & Heinberg, 2003). In this sense, ethnic identity may be celebrated as a source of pride that encourages women to adhere to their own cultural beauty norms that may incorporate more expansive definitions of beauty that deemphasize thinness and extend beyond idealistic portrayals of attraction (Cheney, 2011). Stronger ethnic identification may also help Asian American women feel a sense of connection and belonging, which in general can act as a resiliency factor against pressures to become thin.

Conversely, other studies suggest ethnic identification and adherence to traditional Asian cultural values can confer risk for body image concerns. A study by Phan and Tylka (2006) with Asian American college women ($N=200$) found that ethnic identity indirectly predicts internalization of the thin ideal and body preoccupation through self-esteem. Moreover, they discovered women with stronger ethnic identification reported greater pressures to be thin. Other research by Rakhkovskaya and Warren (2014) found that lower levels of ethnic identification among a sample of ethnically diverse college women ($N=816$) were associated with more eating concerns. It is hypothesized that exposure to racism could enhance desire to embody Western cultural beauty norms of smallness and femininity as a way of assimilation, yet women may feel dissatisfied with ethnically defined features they cannot change (Ting & Hwang, 2007). Moreover, it is probable that women with stronger attachments to their ethnic group compare their body shape and size more often to other Asian women, whom are often physically petite, which can create unrealistic pressures to be thin (Lau et al., 2006). Although some studies did not find an association between ethnic identification and eating disorders (Cheng, 2014; Iyer & Haslam, 2003), it is important to expand on the current literature to investigate how adherence to particular cultural practices can influence satisfaction with racially-salient body features.

Acculturation

Similar to ethnic identity, acculturation is another salient factor that has been widely examined in relation to body image among Asian women (Kawamura, 2002). Acculturation is described as the integration of customs, practices, and beliefs of multiple cultures as well as the psychological processes and adaptation associated with exposure

to one's culture of origin and a new culture (Miller, Yang, Hui, Choi, & Lim, 2011). It has recently been measured with bilinear models such that adherence to one culture does not necessarily mean less adherence to another (Kim, 2007; Miller, 2007). It is important to note that acculturation is a multidimensional process and is constantly changing for each person across time and contexts (Serdarevic & Chronister, 2005). Theorists have hypothesized that women who acculturate to Western culture beauty norms would compare themselves more frequently to White women and would then more often idealize unrealistic standards of attractiveness (Mastria, 2002). Although this theoretical perspective has been supported in research examining some immigrant women (Sussman, Trong & Lim, 2007), the relationship between acculturation and body image concerns among Asian American women is much less clear.

Generally there is some consensus that acculturation can result in a double bind for Asian women where adherence to either Western or traditional cultural values can heighten risk for body image concerns. Some researchers suggest that assimilation to the dominant group can heighten body surveillance and awareness of racialized components of the body that may be considered non-normative or unattractive (Mastria, 2002). Conversely, other research suggests that retention of traditional cultural beauty norms within more patriarchal societies can increase pressures to appear thin, modest, and attractive (Smart & Tsong, 2014). A few researchers have found no empirical evidence supporting a relationship among acculturation, eating pathology, and body image disturbance among diverse ethnic groups (Reddy & Crowther, 2007; Wildes, Emory, & Simons, 2001). Yet other studies have discovered that stronger adherence to Asian values, and in turn less acculturation, was more predictive of greater overall body image

dissatisfaction (Tsai, Curbow, & Heinberg, 2003; Lau, Lum, Chronister, & Forrest, 2006). A study by Tsong and Smart (2015) with a community sample of Asian American women ($N=324$) mirrors these findings in that women who endorsed particular traditional cultural values (i.e. family recognition through achievement and emotional self-control) reported more disordered eating. It has been hypothesized that some Asian American women experience pressure to maintain a perfect physical appearance and may be subject to criticism for failing to please parents and the community (Smart et al., 2011; Tsong & Smart, 2015). Collectively, these mixed findings warrant increased attention as Asian American women must navigate multiple cultural pressures and variant standards of attractiveness.

Culturally-Appropriate Etiological Framework

Current literature lacks a cohesive framework to understand the etiology of body image concerns for Asian American women. Asian American women are subject to distinct racial discrimination and negative stereotyping that may increase vulnerability for body image dissatisfaction. Many current theories are validated with primarily White samples (Bordo, 2009) and no studies to date examine Asian American women's multiple marginalized statuses and their collective influence on women's adaptive body image beliefs. Asian American women's intersecting identities may influence how they internally understand and perceive their bodies as well as how their bodies are externally evaluated and critiqued depending on the context. By understanding the social meanings of the body in relation to Asian American women's intersecting identities, this research can offer an etiological framework to better understand the contextual factors and systems of hierarchy that may shape body image beliefs.

Many prior studies frame body image as a stable, trait-level characteristic across time and contexts, which neglects to consider body image as a socially-constructed process that is influenced by situational factors (Melnik et al., 2004). Although there is growing interest in understanding the culturally-relevant determinants of body dissatisfaction among U.S.-born Asian American women (Cheng, 2014; Iyer & Haslam, 2003; Reddy & Crowther, 2007), these studies do not consider how women adapt their body image beliefs as a form of impression management (Lester, 2004). This social contextual perspective, however, offers a meaningful developmental framework for understanding body image as an evolving, contextually-based construct that is affected by both individualistic (e.g. core values) and broader structural factors (e.g. racism). The present literature does not consider Asian American women's variant body images in the context of their intersecting identities, which seems to oversimplify the complexity of their socialization experiences. In an effort to elucidate the distinct body image experiences of Asian American women, this qualitative study explored women's shifting body image beliefs in the light of their femininity, racial, and ethnic identities.

Appendix B
Recruitment Flyer



**YOU'RE
INVITED!!!!**

Participate in our Body Image Study

Our study involves participating in a 1-1.5 hour interview about your body image experiences.

Earn \$15!!

Contact
terphealth@gmail.com
Contact
terphealth@gmail.com
Contact:
terphealth@gmail.com
Contact:
terphealth@gmail.com
Contact:
terphealth@gmail.com
Contact:
terphealth@gmail.com
Contact:
terphealth@gmail.com
Contact:
terphealth@gmail.com
Contact:
terphealth@gmail.com

**Participant
Requirements:**

**Asian American
Female**

**17-25 years old,
Full Time Student**

Born in the U.S.

**GENDER, CULTURE &
HEALTH LAB**

3128 Biology Psychology
Building

Distresstoleranceumd@gmail.com

Appendix C

Pre-Screening Instrument



What is your age?

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Other (please specify)

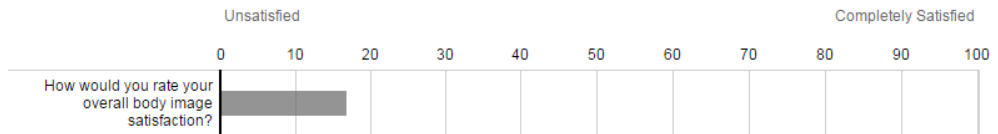
What is your ethnicity (choose as many as applicable)?

- Chinese
- Korean
- Japanese
- Filipino
- Indian
- Vietnamese
- Other (please specify)

Were you born in the United States?

- Yes

The next few questions will ask you about your body image experiences. Please answer as honestly and openly as you can.



What is one part of your body that you particularly like?

What is one part of your body that you particularly do not like?



Appendix D

Sample Parental Consent Form

Project Title	Body Image Experiences Among Asian American Women: An Intersectionality Approach
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Jennifer Brady and Dr. Derek Iwamoto at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are an Asian American women, born in the United States, and an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland. The purpose of this research project is to cultivate a deep understanding of the ways women strategically shift their body image beliefs in the context of their dynamic and intersecting identities (e.g. femininity, racial, and ethnic identities).
Procedures	If you agree to be part of this study at least one of your parents must give his or her permission. You will complete a 1-1.5 hour long interview describing your understanding of your femininity, racial, and ethnic identities, your feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of your body, and your beliefs of Western and cultural beauty norms. All interviews will be audio-recorded with a secure audio-recording device. To protect your confidentiality, any identifying information about the women, or other individuals disclosed during the interviews, will be deleted from the transcript. Participant interviews will then be immediately assigned an identification number and pseudonyms will be used throughout the duration of this article to ensure anonymity.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	Although we do not anticipate any risks, the current study may pose some minor risk related to frustration, distress or embarrassment from questions regarding potential exposure to discrimination or oppression as well as negative feelings about your body, during the interview. Questions address personal and sensitive topics. You do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. You may skip questions or stop your participation at any time.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, possible benefits include increased insight into protective or adaptive body image beliefs, normalization and validation of negative body image experiences, and affirmation that women can strategically shift their body image beliefs. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of meaningful contextual

	factors and socialization processes that shape body image beliefs and attitudes.
Compensation	You will receive one SONA credit for participation in this study.
Confidentiality	<p>The interviews will be conducted in a quiet, confidential location on campus in the lead researcher’s office. Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing your email address and other contact information separately from your interview responses. Your responses to this interview will be grouped with the responses of all other participants in any reports. The information provided on the participant locator form, such as your name, address, and emergency contacts, will be kept in a secure location and will not be linked to your interview responses. This information will only be used to process the study incentive payments.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p>
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</p> <p>Jennifer Brady, Principal Investigator at: 3128 Biology Psychology Building, College Park, MD 20740, 267-980-0294 jbrady19@umd.edu</p> <p>Dr. Derek Iwamoto, Co-Investigator, at: 2147A Biology Psychology Building, College Park, MD 20740, 203-909-2195, diwamoto@umd.edu</p>

<p>Participant Rights</p>	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Institutional Review Board Office</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1204 Marie Mount Hall</p> <p style="text-align: center;">College Park, Maryland, 20742</p> <p style="text-align: center;">E-mail: irb@umd.edu</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>		
<p>Statement of Consent</p>	<p>Your signature indicates that you have read this assent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed form.</p> <p>If you assent to participating, please sign your name below.</p>		
<p>Signature and Date</p>	<p>NAME OF PARTICIPANT</p> <p>[Please Print]</p>		
	<p>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</p>		
	<p>DATE</p>		

Sample Student Consent Form

Project Title	Body Image Experiences Among Asian American Women: An Intersectionality Approach
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Jennifer Brady and Dr. Derek Iwamoto at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are an Asian American women, born in the United States, and an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland. The purpose of this research project is to cultivate a deep understanding of the ways women strategically shift their body image beliefs in the context of their dynamic and intersecting identities (e.g. femininity, racial, and ethnic identities).
Procedures	You will complete a 1-1.5 hour long interview describing your understanding of your femininity, racial, and ethnic identities, your feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of your body, and your beliefs of Western and cultural beauty norms. All interviews will be audio-recorded with a secure audio-recording device. To protect your confidentiality, any identifying information about the women, or other individuals disclosed during the interviews, will be deleted from the transcript. Participant interviews will then be immediately assigned an identification number and pseudonyms will be used throughout the duration of this article to ensure anonymity.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	Although we do not anticipate any risks, the current study may pose some minor risk related to frustration, distress or embarrassment from questions regarding potential exposure to discrimination or oppression as well as negative feelings about your body, during the interview. Questions address personal and sensitive topics. You do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. You may skip questions or stop your participation at any time.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, possible benefits include increased insight into protective or adaptive body image beliefs, normalization and validation of negative body image experiences, and affirmation that women can strategically shift their body image beliefs. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of meaningful contextual factors and socialization processes that shape body image beliefs and attitudes.

Compensation	You will receive one SONA credit for participation in this study.
Confidentiality	<p>The interviews will be conducted in a quiet, confidential location on campus in the lead researcher’s office. Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing your email address and other contact information separately from your interview responses. Your responses to this interview will be grouped with the responses of all other participants in any reports. The information provided on the participant locator form, such as your name, address, and emergency contacts, will be kept in a secure location and will not be linked to your interview responses. This information will only be used to process the study incentive payments.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p>
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</p> <p>Jennifer Brady, Principal Investigator at: 3128 Biology Psychology Building, College Park, MD 20740, 267-980-0294 jbrady19@umd.edu</p> <p>Dr. Derek Iwamoto, Co-Investigator, at: 2147A Biology Psychology Building, College Park, MD 20740, 203-909-2195, diwamoto@umd.edu</p>
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:

	<p align="center"> University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 </p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>	
<p>Statement of Consent</p>	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>	
<p>Signature and Date</p>	<p>NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]</p>	
	<p>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</p>	
	<p>DATE</p>	

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself (e.g. interests, hobbies, major).
2. How do you define yourself ethnically/culturally/racially?
3. Complete the sentence: As a woman, I am expected to _____.
4. As an Asian American woman, how do these expectations play a role in your everyday life?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your parents?
6. To what extent do your parents expect you to adhere to traditional Asian cultural values?
7. As an Asian American woman, what does body image mean to you?
8. In your culture of origin, what makes a woman attractive?
9. In what ways are these beliefs different than Western standards of attractiveness?
10. On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being extremely negative and 10 being extremely positive), how do you feel about your body?
11. How have your body image beliefs changed over time?
12. What racial/ethnic group(s) do you compare your body to most often?
13. Reflect on a time in which you were aware of your body or appearance when around someone from this racial/ethnic group. Describe this situation in detail.
 - a. Who was around?
 - b. Where were you?
 - c. How did you feel about your body? Why?
 - d. How do you believe this group evaluates your body?
 - e. How do you adjust your body image beliefs in relation to this group's body image beliefs?
14. Are there any differences in how you feel about your body when you are with men versus with women?
15. How does your cultural/family background influence your current likes and dislikes about your body?
16. Reflecting on this interview today, is there anything new you learned about yourself or other women?

Table 1. *Participant Demographic Information*

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	B.I.R	Liked Features	Disliked Features
Chloe	½ Chinese ½ Laotian	19	6.5	Eyes, hair	Stomach, weight
Jenny	½ Korean ½ White	18	7	Hair, height, leanness	Stomach, acne
Shabani	Indian	21	6.5	Hips	Stomach, weight
Lin	Chinese	20	6	Eyes, eyebrows, hair	Stomach, weight, lack muscles
Yun	Chinese	18	6	Hair, having curves	Stomach, eye-brows, eyes
Nancy	Chinese	20	7.5	Eyes, smaller frame	Calves, legs, shortness
Connie	Chinese	20	6	Lips, face, hands, curves	Stomach, fatness in legs, nose
Esther	Korean	18	7	Stomach, skinny	Face shape, weight, eye color
Sana	Pakistani	19	8.5	Hair, weight	Breast size, lack of curves
Chrissie	½ Singaporean ½ Taiwanese	19	4	Hair	Thighs, weight, acne
Jamie	Korean	20	6.5	Lips	Skin, shortness
Jacqueline	Vietnamese	21	3.5	Legs, height, flawless skin	Stomach, body hair, breast size
Grace	Korean	19	4.5	Calves, smiley eyes	Stomach, short torso, breast size, height
Adeline	Chinese	20	6.5	High-cheek bones	Stomach, height, eye-size, weight, acne
Min	½ Chinese ½ Burmese	20	8	Eyes, curves	Nose, acne, height
Sunita	½ Indian ½ White	18	7.5	Legs, all parts	Feet, flat butt, body hair, lack of muscles
Indra	Indian	22	8.5	Waist, skinny, light skin tone	Love handles, breasts
Arpana	Bengali	19	2	Lips, light skin tone, face shape, body proportions	Weight, body hair, acne, height, feet
Elaine	Chinese	18	5.5	Eyes, legs	Small breasts, lack of curves, eyes
Fatima	¼ White ¼ African American ½ Pakistani	18	7.5	Eyes, feet	Back, small butt, acne

*B.I.R.=Body Image Rating; B.I.R. was a self-identified score out of 10, with 1 representing strong dissatisfaction and 10 representing strong satisfaction.

Table 2. *Summary of Domains, Categories, Properties and Frequencies*

Categories	Properties	Typicality
D1: Contextual Conditions		
Navigating Cultural Beauty Norms	Conflicting cultural differences in defining attraction	11 (T)
	Awareness of biologically unattainable features	12 (T)
	Perceived attractiveness is context-dependent and fluid	16 (T)
	Unattainable media images can heighten awareness of appearance-deficits	16 (T)
	Exposure to White aesthetic beauty norms	8 (V)
Experiences of Sexism and Racism	Appearance maintenance and effort	14 (T)
	Endorsement of modesty	12 (T)
	Desire to cover up to avoid unwanted attention	7 (V)
	Submissiveness/passivity is expected and desired by others	11 (T)
	Microaggressions and race-related teasing	11 (T)
D2: Interpersonal Influences		
Peer Influences	Upward body image comparisons	19 (G)
	Desire and oppose feedback from men	16 (T)
	Navigate web of comparisons and evaluative feedback from same-sex peers	8 (V)
Parental Influences	Criticism or feedback about weight and body	15 (T)
	Quality of family dynamics	17 (T)
	Modeling mother's appearance effort and beauty practices	7 (V)
	Family models appearance is not a determinant of self-worth	7 (V)
D3: Identity Formation		
Integrated Identity Appreciation	Self-affirmation and self-acceptance	5 (V)
	Personal definition of beauty	5 (V)
	Personal definition of what it means to be an AA woman	5 (V)
Disintegrated Identity Depreciation	Self-concealment or self-depreciation	5 (V)
	Internalization of unrealistic beauty standards	5 (V)

N=20, G (General)=applicable to all cases, or all but one case; T (Typical)=applicable to at least half of the cases; V (Variant)= applicable to less than half of cases but more than one case, AA= Asian American

Table 3. *Body Image Management Strategies*

Coping Strategy	Selected Quotes
<p>Body Appreciation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciate diverse body sizes and shapes Value body functionality Value health over appearance 	<p>“I guess because like I have a lot of friends on the internet and like they are all different shapes and sizes and it just kind of makes you more aware how normal it is to not have a completely flat stomach or a thigh gap or something” -<i>Chloe</i></p> <p>“I think there are ways that I can definitely improve my body but that’s more for like a fitness area. Like I am pretty happy with my body as far as like how it works. Like it works! I can do things with it!” -<i>Min</i></p>
<p>Body Acceptance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create individualized appearance Embrace body in spite of flaws 	<p>“I think I just like think about what would make like me personally look good, instead of like, what like American versus Asian standards of beauty would be good for me”- <i>Jenny</i></p> <p>“You don’t always have to work and be prettier or have a better body image, sometimes you just need to work on feeling more comfortable with yourself”-<i>Indra</i></p>
<p>Cognitive Restructuring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge self-defeating thoughts Reality testing Focus on positive features Discount negative feedback 	<p>“Now I’m like noticing oh there are certain features that I kind of like and that I’m okay with, so I am definitely just becoming more able to pick out the things that I like about my body and focus on those rather than pinpoint the negatives.”- <i>Shabani</i></p> <p>“But I kind of wanted to be stronger than that, and so, I didn’t want to give in to what other people thought, I wanted to you know, build myself up on the inside so that it wouldn’t matter to me as much. I feel like that was more important to me than to be what they wanted me to be.”- <i>Jamie</i></p>
<p>Positive Role Models</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create empowering relationships Restrain desire to compare 	<p>“Well I feel like that I met so many people that are bigger and they have such good body images and they are like really positive and really still happy with the way that they look even though they are bigger. I guess it’s just inspiring that they would be so happy with the way that they look.”- <i>Chloe</i></p> <p>“The people I surround myself with have the same kind of viewpoints in terms of body image. So like that really helped. I never really felt pressured to change what I do to fit a better body image.” -<i>Sunita</i></p>
<p>Appearance Investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase appearance maintenance/effort Elicit compliments Strive for improvements 	<p>“I really like dressing up, so I often dress really nice--even just for class. I often get compliments, like that always makes me feel good.”- <i>Adeline</i></p> <p>“I mean it will make me just more self-conscious (parental body criticism) but then like, they’re pointing it out and then I’ll go back to school and I’ll go to the gym, I’ll eat healthier so it’s going to get better. I know it’s going to get better so I don’t really let it affect me.”- <i>Fatima</i></p>

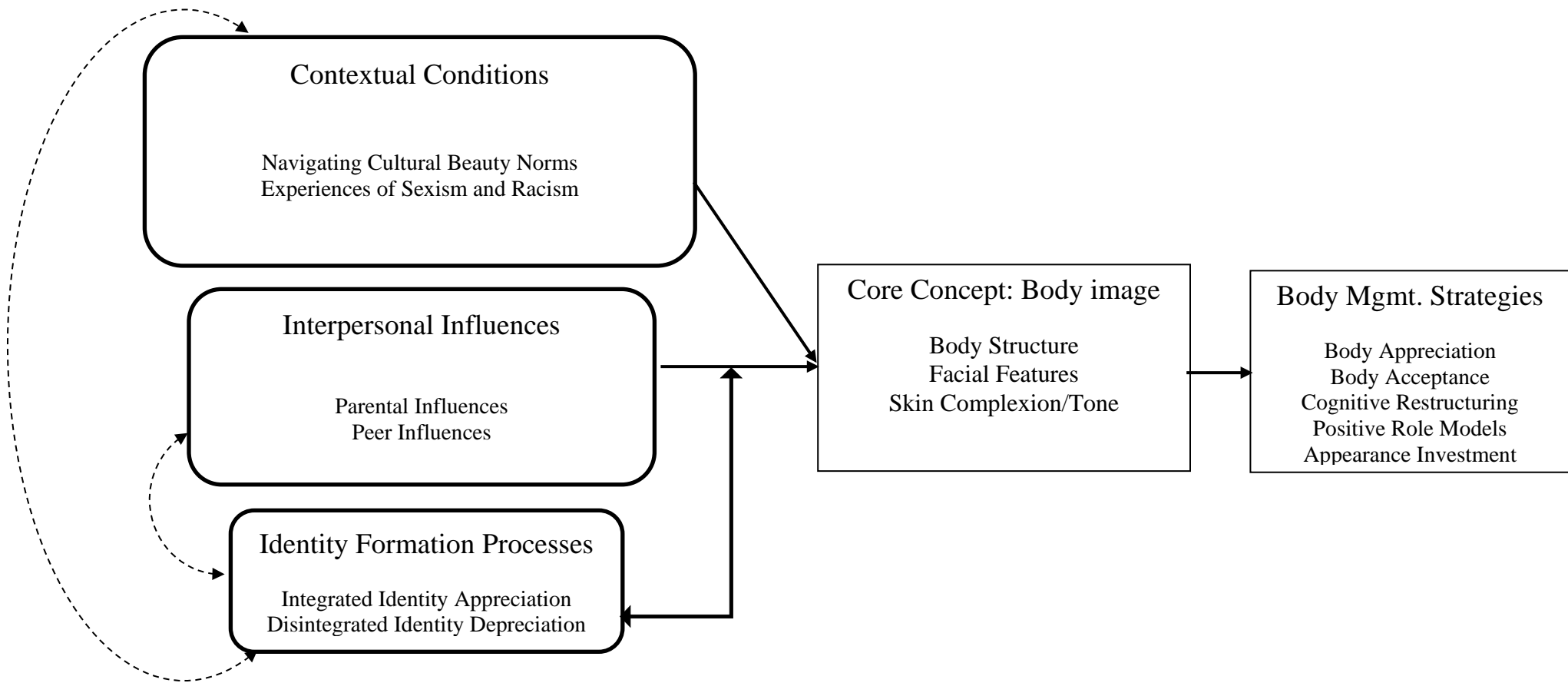


Figure 1. *Model of Asian American women's body image experiences*

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