

Culture of Thinness?

An Examination of the Factors That Influence Body Image at
an All-Women's College

Research Questions

- Does a culture of thinness exist at Saint Mary's?
- If one does, what factors contribute to the formation of this culture?

Thesis

- Social expectations on campus and media influences on the 'thin-ideal' create a culture of thinness at Saint Mary's College.

Literature Review

- Changing Views on Body Image and Pressures from the Media
 - Brumberg (1997)
 - Dworkin and Wachs (2009)
 - Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, and Kelly (1986)
 - Hawkins, Richards, Granley, and Stein (2004)

Literature Review

- The Role of Societal Factors on Body Image
 - Montreath and McCabe (1997)
 - Clay, Vignoles, and Dittmar (2005)
 - Tiggemann and Miller (2010)

Literature Review

- History of All-Women's Colleges and Their Demographics
 - Schier and Russett (2002)
 - Miller-Bernal and Poulson (2006)
 - Cash and Green (1986)
 - Paquette and Raine (2004)

Theory

- Social Construction of Reality
 - Berger and Luckmann (1966)

- Social Construction of Gender
 - Judith Lorber (1994)

Methodology

- Survey Monkey
- Consisted of demographic questions, yes/no questions, and open-ended questions.
- 34 students from the classes of 2011, 2012, and 2013.
- 33 classified themselves as white

Strengths: Confidentiality, larger sample than interviews

Weaknesses: Somewhat small sample size, clarification could not be asked

Findings

Opinion of Friends of Body Image	Responses
Somewhat Important	13
Neither Important nor Unimportant	7
Somewhat Important	6
Very Important	6
Not Important At All	2
	N=34

Findings

Description of Ideal Body Image	Responses
“Thin” Or “Toned”	15
“Fit”	4
Specific Size	3
“Curvy”	3
“Being Comfortable”	2
Celebrity Reference	2
No Answer	2
Specific Weight	2
Reference Certain Body Parts	1
	N=34

Finding

Typical Look of a Saint Mary's Student	Responses
"Average"	11
"Thin" Or "Skinny"	9
No Typical Look	5
"Fit" or "Toned"	4
No Answer	2
Specific Clothing	1
Specific Body Parts	1
Overweight	1
	N=34

Findings

Does a culture of thinness exist?	Responses
Yes	20
No Answer	9
No	5
	N=34

Findings

- Reasons for the existence of a culture of thinness
 - Competition among the women on campus
 - Need to impress men at Notre Dame
 - Influence of the media

Discussion

- Notable difference between upperclassmen and underclassmen responses
- Participants often felt that they had been pressure in one way or another to look a certain way while they have attend Saint Mary's.
- Women are more likely to be influenced by their peers and colleagues
- Due to the single sex education setting, the pressures may be much higher here.

Discussion

- Illustrates Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction

QUESTIONS???