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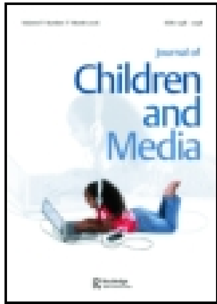

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BECOMING TWEEN BODIES
What preadolescent girls in the US say about beauty, the "just-right ideal," and the "Disney Girls"

Margaret L. McGladrey

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Preadolescent girls in the US consume more commercial media, much of which emphasizes a narrow conceptualization of ideal beauty, in more varied formats than any generation preceding them. This study used qualitative methods including participant-created photo collages, email diaries, and in-depth interviews to elicit information about how a racially and socioeconomically diverse group of 9- to 11-year-old US girls interacted with traditional and new media, envisioned the beauty ideal, and interpreted the need to subscribe to beauty and body maintenance practices. This analysis identified the contours of the "just-right ideal" to which girls aspire, the "Disney Girls" who embody it, and the complicated ways in which girls integrate the beauty practices prescribed by this ideal into their lives.

KEYWORDS beauty ideals; body image; tween; Girls' Studies; media reception; qualitative methods; neoliberalism; Disney

Marketing idealized beauty to young girls has become lucrative business. Sales of beauty products in the US Tween market were forecasted to reach more than $8 billion by 2012 (Rose, 2008). Important work (e.g., McAllister 2007; Northrup & Liebler 2010) has examined what Hall (2001) might consider "encoded" media messages about beauty targeted toward preadolescent girls. However, scholarship on girls' interpretations and "decodings" of beauty images and messages, while significant, has focused on adolescent and young adult women (Bettie 2003; Bloustien 2003; Finders 1996; Mazzarella 2005; Pomerantz 2008; Zaslow 2009), with the exception of Chan's (2012) interviews with preadolescent girls in Hong Kong. Extending lines of inquiry about how older girls interpret beauty messages to preadolescent girls whose stages of cognitive (Piaget 1972) and psychosocial (Crain 2011) development are distinct from adolescents, this study used qualitative methods, including participant-generated collages, email diaries, and in-depth interviews, to explore how Millennial-generation girls between the ages of 9 and 11 from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds decode, interpret, accept, modify, and reject beauty messages presented in US commercial media. Rather than treat upon well-established connections between media use and body image disturbances (see Levine & Harrison 2009, for a comprehensive review), the goal of this project was to analyze the conceptualizations of ideal beauty to which preadolescent girls aspire and to illuminate

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whether and how girls interpret the lifestyles of the celebrities who embody this ideal as normative for their everyday behavior and prerequisite for social acceptance. The participants articulated what I termed a "just-right ideal," distinct from the "curvaceously thin ideal" that teenaged and young adult girls seek to emulate (Harrison 2003), and described a set of behaviors and purchases that they perceived as necessary to achieve this ideal. The findings of this study also contradicted the "moral panic" associated with protectionist stances toward young girls' media consumption (e.g., Levin & Kilbourne 2009; Orenstein 2011), as participants' multi-vocal interpretations of beauty messages countered the popular assumption that girls uniformly worship and desire the lifestyles of the celebrities whose images they perceive as ideal.

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Neoliberal Girlhood and Beauty-based Governmentality

In recent years, Girls' Studies has moved toward more culturally oriented explorations of girlhood as a distinct period of identity formation (Mazzarella & Pecora 2007). For girls growing up in a neoliberal sociopolitical context, where it is not structural constraints but "good choices, effort, and ambition alone that are responsible for success that has come to separate the can-dos from the at-risks" (Harris 2004, p. 16), a central identity-formation project is the fashioning of a beautiful appearance and appropriately slender body. Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz's (2009) book-length study involved an in-depth investigation of how teenaged girls conceptualize popularity, a key determinant of agency and self-worth in girls' social lives (p. 83). The authors' definition of popularity bears repeating in full:

> As used by the girls in our study, "Popular" signals membership in the prized – and well-guarded – clique of an idealized girlhood that meets the standards of "emphasized femininity." Across different school contexts, only girls who were pretty, not fat, attractive, and attracted to boys could ever hope to gain membership in the Popular clique. As a "universalized" standard, it cut across class and racialized divisions. (2009, p. 94)

Unsurprisingly, this description mirrors what Harrison (2003) termed the "curvaceously thin ideal" woman manifest throughout US commercial media in the form of Victoria's Secret and Playboy models as well as women in children's media content such as the Disney Princesses and Barbie, who has a 36-inch bust, a 24-inch waist, and 36-inch hips while wearing a size 4 (hips), size 2 (waist), and a size 10 (bust). Maintaining this ideal requires a costly regimen of beauty products, making the girl embodying this appearance the ideal neoliberal subject (Gill 2007).

In this way, the self-objectification implied in the formation of neoliberal subjectivities parallels the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, which may be defined as the training of citizens through informal cultural pedagogies such as commercial media to consider themselves in the third-person so that they might control, govern, and discipline themselves to relieve the government of the burden of doing so (Gill 2007). Processes of internalizing the other's gaze are also intimately linked to the neoliberal economy as a means to provide instruction in the consumptive practices associated with beauty and body maintenance. Wolf (1992) described this form of beauty-based governmentality in terms of an ever-expanding gulf between one's actual physical form and the ideal, the closing of which is highly lucrative business.

Advertisers have taken advantage of these discourses in order to manufacture a lucrative market segment: the "Tween." Cook and Kaiser (2004) introduced the concept of

"anticipatory enculturation" to teenagerdom to describe the age ambiguity, forward-looking nature, and "in-betweenness" of the Tween market, which results from "the tension between trying to meet girls' ever-pressing demands for a sense of autonomy and personhood (i.e., encoded in looking 'older') and yet 'keeping' them in the Tween category and store" (Cook & Kaiser 2004, p. 219). Anticipatory enculturation encourages Tweens to experiment with the beauty products and consumption practices that advertisers prescribe for teen girls, allowing retailers to groom a group of new consumers who are responsible for billions of dollars in purchases per year.

Theorizing Body-Image Relations

Previous communication and psychological research has drawn upon a variety of theories to explain how women and girls interact with these messages and images about beauty: social comparison theory (e.g., Northrup & Liebler 2010); cultivation theory (e.g., Harrison 2003); media priming (e.g., Aubrey, Henson, Hopper, & Smith, 2009); self-discrepancy theory (e.g., Harrison 2001); objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997), and appearance schemas (e.g., Sinton & Birch 2006). Each of these theories relies upon a causal, linear model of subject-object relations in which effects flow in one direction, with externally produced images and messages exerting influence over internal processes of self-body relations.

Such explanations leave no room for the possibility that mediated images of women's bodies derive meaning from subjects' interpretations of them, and women and girls come to know their own bodies through their reflections in images. Just as "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beauvoir, 1972/1949, p. 267), bodies are not born, but rather become through their interactions with images. Drawing upon Deleuze's philosophy of the body-as-process, feminist media scholar Coleman (2008) argued, "A body is not a human subject who has relations with images, but rather a body is the relation between what conventional philosophy has called a human subject and images" (p. 168). One's own body cannot be seen in its totality while one inhabits it; humans require images as referents to how their bodies actually appear from the outside. Similarly, the bodies of others cannot be felt or experienced from within, but only seen from an external vantage point. It is not the image or the body in isolation or in linear relation, then, but the dialogic interaction between the image and the body that forms a woman's body consciousness, and this body-image relationship is constantly transforming and evolving within particular contexts.

As such, empirical research on the ways in which women and girls interpret beauty messages benefits from considering broader questions about the processes by which human bodies and media images interact. As Coleman (2008) asserted, "if relations with images constitute bodies, a focus of feminist research should be on how bodies are experienced through images and on how these experiences limit or extend the becoming of bodies" (p. 164). Qualitative methods are particularly useful in addressing these questions because they concern the exploration of the *meanings* women and girls ascribe to their experiences with media images and the *processes* by which women and girls' relationships with these images evolve (Maxwell 1998, p. 75). Following this line of thinking, the research questions for this study include:

RQ1: What sources of new and traditional media do girls use?

RQ2: How do preadolescent girls interpret idealized images of the female body in the media?

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RQ3: How do girls' interpretations of beauty images and messages affect their perspectives and behaviors?

The Participants

Participants in the study included a racially and socioeconomically diverse group of twenty-two girls between the ages of 9 and 11 who were in grades 4 and 5 from Junior troops of Girl Scouts in Central Kentucky. Although it might be assumed that participants recruited from an organization like the Girl Scouts would be primarily middle-class and White, the sample of girls recruited for this study represented more racial diversity than the population of Fayette County, as four of the twenty-two participants identified as Black/African-American (18 per cent of the sample) compared with the 2009 population estimate that 13.5 per cent of this county's population is Black (University of Louisville Kentucky State Data Center, 2010), and two girls self-identified as being of mixed racial heritage. The girls also came from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, and some girls had two parents who worked outside the home, some had fathers who worked while their mothers stayed home, and some lived in single-mother homes or with their grandparents. As an incentive to participate in the study, girls received a "Girls Voices" merit patch from their local council and a full-color "mini-magazine" that I designed using the girls' collages, quotes, and pseudonyms so that they could access the research findings in a format that was easy and fun for them to explore.

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Methods

Tammivaara and Enright (1986) asserted that children have membership in at least two cultures: one of their making with their peers and one created by adults. Just as children hold dual citizenship in adult and child worlds and can move seamlessly between the two, adult researchers can strive to modify aspects of their self-presentation "so that if they are not perceived as children, they may be perceived as out-of-the-ordinary adults" (Tammivaara & Enright 1986, p. 229). Toward the goal of being perceived as an out-of-the-ordinary adult, I built rapport during interviews by demonstrating a familiarity with girls' media culture, referencing my knowledge of Tween celebrities like Katy Perry, Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez, and Justin Bieber. Because I was only 15 years older than the girls at the time of data collection, I could match the tone and cadence of my vernacular to the girls' by peppering my speech with words such "like," "totally," "cool," and "you know" as well as speaking in a higher pitched voice and at a faster pace than I normally do. My adoption of the out-of-the-ordinary adult role seemed to be effective because at the end of their interviews, several of the girls wanted to know my true age. Despite the inevitability of power differentials between adult researchers and child informants, my conscious adoption of the out-of-the-ordinary adult role indicated to my participants that I was interested in understanding what they truly thought about their own media environments rather than in being told what they think typical adults want to hear.

The first phase of the study involved conducting one-on-one orientation interviews with the participants, in which I spoke with each girl for 45 to 60 minutes about her relationships with the media and with her body. Many of the questions for this initial interview consisted of items from commonly used psychological scales modified to serve as a qualitative interview guide. These questions measured self-objectification using the Objectified Relationship with

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the Body subscale of the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale (Tolman & Porche 2000); body surveillance using the Surveillance subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale for Youth (Lindberg, Hyde, & McKinley, 2006); and eating attitudes and dieting behaviors using the Children's Eating Attitudes Test (Maloney, McGuire, Daniels, & Specker, 1989). Other questions included basic demographics such as age, gender, race, and family characteristics. Finally, I offered basic training in computer-based collaging techniques using a laptop computer to demonstrate how to work with Internet browsers and search engines to gather images and PowerPoint to create photo collages. The participants also had the option to use scissors and glue to create the collage if they preferred. As in Currie *et al.* (2009), girls were asked during the initial interview to select their own pseudonyms.

After the initial interview, the participants developed weekly email diary entries submitted via Qualtrics for a 6-week period describing their interactions with images of women and girls in online, televised, and print media contexts. Psychological researchers (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001) have employed diary methods to study experiences of sexism in college-aged populations, finding the diary method to be more accurate than retrospective methods like surveys and interviews in capturing the everyday and easily forgotten incidents of sexism (Swim *et al.*, 2001, p. 32). Hessler *et al.* (2003) introduced email diaries as the main data-gathering tool in a qualitative study of adolescent risk behavior. For the first weekly entry, girls were asked questions about how much time they spent with different types of media during a typical day and what types of content they typically use. For every subsequent weekly entry, girls were asked to identify images of women and girls that they had encountered online, on television, and in print throughout the week and describe their interpretations of these images by responding to open-ended questions, as in Swim *et al.* (2001) diary method. Every week, I emailed the participants a link to the diary form from a Gmail address used exclusively for this study, allowing me to store their responses securely on the Qualtrics server.

The study asked girls not only to report what media they used and respond to questions about how these media made them feel but also to create collages that reconfigure media images in ways that were meaningful to them. According to Whiting (2009), the photo collage technique is beneficial in terms of providing children with an enjoyable means to convey their thoughts and emotions as well as eliciting different perspectives than methods that focus on the spoken or written word. Throughout the email diary phase, the girls were asked to select between ten and twenty images of women and girls, from any print or digital media source of their choosing, and then put them together into a collage, using either PowerPoint or scissors and glue to display the images in any way they saw fit.

After completing their sixth email diary and the photo collage, the girls participated in a 15- to 30-minute follow-up interview using the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), in which we explored the girls' thoughts and feelings about the images they collaged as well as their diary entries. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) recommended following the diary period with interviews to allow participants to clarify the contexts, motives, and consequences of their entries. The ZMET has been used in studies in which children served as participants (El-Bassiouny, Taher, & Abou Aish, 2008, p. 8), including in the design of the new Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh (Bilec *et al.*, 2009). The ZMET employed in this interview involved five steps (Coulter, Zaltman, & Coulter, 2001):

(1) Storytelling. Participants were asked to describe how each picture related to her impressions of women's bodies in the media in narrative form.

(2) Missed images. Participants were asked about whether they had any impressions about women's bodies in the media for which they could not find an appropriate image. Participants then discussed the impression and described an image that would illustrate that impression.
(3) Construct elicitation. The participants were asked to select three images that "stuck out" to them and describe how any two of the images they selected are similar yet different from the third in terms of how they portray women's bodies.
(4) Sensory images. The participants were asked to use taste, touch, smell, sound, color, and emotional feeling to describe their responses to the images of women's bodies in their collages.
(5) The summary image. The participants selected the single image or group of images that best described their overall opinions of the portrayal of women's bodies in the media and explain how the image represented their thoughts and feelings. The participants could also describe how they might want to alter the image(s) to better correspond to their overall impressions.

Taken together, the weekly email diary entries and ZMET interview on the girls' collages created a multifaceted bricolage of how participants interacted with and interpreted media images and messages about women's bodies. Although extensive qualitative data were collected regarding girls' interpersonal discursive environments on the topic of body image as well as their personal relationships with their own bodies and with food/exercise, the following discussion and analysis of this study's findings draws from the initial interviews, follow-up interviews, collages, and email diaries to focus on girls' interpretations of beauty images in the media.

Girls' Media Environments

The data collected regarding the amount of time girls spent interacting with the media was self-reported by the girls in their initial email diaries, which might cast doubts regarding the accuracy of their reporting. For example, some girls thought that they spend 15 + hours with the media on weekdays, which seems highly improbable given their school and family schedules. The email diary questions did not account for "media multi-tasking" (e.g., listening to music online, watching movies on television), which could explain to some degree the unrealistically high number of hours girls reported spending using media, as girls may have double-reported their media use. However, the media use data provided meaningful evidence of the relative importance of various media to participants, as measured by *perceived amounts of time* they spent with television, magazines, music, computers, video games, movies, and non-school books. The data indicated that in general, girls spent more time with the media on weekend days than weekdays and spent less time with magazines, video games, movies, and non-school books than they did with television, music, and computers/online activities, although the data suggested that girls typically watch a movie on weekend days.

Girls were also asked in their first email diaries to report their three favorite types of content for each medium. Eighteen girls mentioned either the Disney channel or specific Disney channel programs or both as a type of television that they typically watch. Nickelodeon (or Nick) channel programming was also popular among participants. In terms of specific programs, *iCarly* on Nick and *Wizards of Waverly Place* on Disney were the most

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frequently watched among participants. Magazines were not frequently used among this group of preadolescent girls. Several girls could not list even one example of a magazine that they read. Music was very popular among the girls in this study, and several favorite artists emerged from the data, including Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, and Miley Cyrus. Computers and online gaming were also frequent past-times for participants. The clear favorite website of girls in this study was Webkinz, a virtual community of pet animal avatars; other gaming and virtual play sites included Coolmath Games, Club Penguin, Wizards101, and Primary Games. Girls allocated some portion of their time with the media to playing video games, especially games on the Wii console. Most girls watched at least one movie on the weekends, and the Harry Potter series dominated the girls' list of favorite non-school books as well as their list of favorite movies.

What is Ideal? Curvaceously Thin vs. Just-Right

Participants in this study articulated what I termed a "just-right ideal" with two defining attributes: a normative body shape and a "pretty" self-presentation. In contrast to the curvaceously thin ideal that prescribes extreme thinness with the exception of a large bustline, the girls in this study expressed that girls should have the "right" shape, which according to Taylor is "not underweight, not overweight." Brittany defined the appearance of the perfect girl in terms of her clothing size, saying, "She'd be like my sister, like a size 7, not a size 2." The "just-right ideal" involves striking the perfect balance between being what Kam called "unhealthy thin" and being overweight or "fat," which girls associated with dire social and health consequences. Unlike the curvaceously thin ideal, which assumes that losing weight is always women's goal, the just-right ideal frames thinness in relative terms, as girls who perceived themselves as being heavier than normal (e.g., Crystal, Dawn, and Christina) desired to be thinner and girls who perceived themselves as being thinner than normal (e.g., JBear and Taylor) desired to be heavier. The girls' preoccupation with a normative body shape and size for their age highlights the centrality of "fitting in" to preadolescents, for whom peer acceptance is vital to both their body image and self-esteem.

According to the participants, a girl who has achieved the just-right ideal is also "pretty," which girls associated with a particular set of consumptive practices and behavioral habits, such as buying attractive clothes that match, using makeup, eating and exercising enough (but not too much), brushing their hair, and having clear skin. McKinze8 said, "She would have like stuff that matched with her clothes. And she would just have pretty clothes and hair. And it would always be brushed." Kam concurred, "People who look really good have hair that isn't a huge mess, their teeth aren't really yellow, it's white. Their skin isn't all messed up." Isabelle thought that in order to look like Miley Cyrus, "Girls would wear lots of makeup and buy really pretty and popular clothes. They will beg for stuff that they really want that is really cool." Some girls used new media to pursue knowledge about how to employ beauty practices such as makeup application. Erica watched makeup tutorials posted by a young woman named Blair on her "juicystar07" You Tube channel. Of Blair, Erica said, "Sometimes I kind of wish I was her, because she's really, really pretty and she's really nice."

Other girls expressed skepticism about using makeup in order to realize the kind of prettiness prescribed by the just-right ideal. For example, Isabelle said:

> I do kind of want to wear makeup and stuff. But I think it should be, it should be sometimes not just always 'picture makeup' all the time . . . Cuz some of the pictures it

looks like they've been in the bathroom for hours and hours, which is the way that my mom is every morning. And so I wish it kind of looked more, like, natural.

When asked why she thought girls and women in the media wear so much makeup, Cupcake said, "so they can have more people that like them. So they can be more popular and more famous," which she claimed was completely unnecessary and distasteful. Similarly, Rose observed that women in the media wear makeup "because people think makeup is pretty. The women try to look pretty. And like, all the hair product commercials make their hair look really perfect so that people will buy the stuff." Therefore, the issue is not whether girls are aware of the consumptive practices and behavioral patterns required to emulate the just-right ideal, but rather the extent to which they accept or reject these practices as mandates for the production of their own body-images.

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Disney Girls and Manufacturing the Tween Beauty Market

The girls were instructed to create a collage of pictures of any women and girls they saw in print or digital media in any way they chose. However, with few exceptions, participants used this creative freedom to reproduce images of Tween starlets rather than pursue creative experimentation with non-normative images of women. This result had nothing to do with girls' familiarity with PowerPoint and the Internet; many of the girls stated they enjoyed using computers in their free time, and several reported having You Tube channels and personal websites. Only one girl elected to use traditional scissors and glue to create her collage, while the others seemed to relish the opportunity to experiment with PowerPoint.

During their follow-up interviews, girls typically reported that their processes of creating the collages involved thinking of their favorite celebrities and then finding pictures of them on the Internet by using image searches. Celebrities associated with The Walt Disney Company—Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, and Taylor Swift—dominated girls' relationships with media culture. The star most frequently featured in the collages was Selena Gomez, who was selected by eleven participants, while Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, and Taylor Swift were featured in eight, seven, and six of the participants' collages, respectively. Besides Lady Gaga (selected by 5 participants) and Michelle Obama (selected by 3 participants), the remaining celebrities selected for inclusion in the collages were affiliated with Disney or Nickelodeon channel programs.

The most prominent celebrities, Selena Gomez and Miley Cyrus, are both starlets produced by Disney and were often mentioned in the initial interviews as examples of what the perfect girl looks like. The girls strongly identified with all of these Disney-produced celebrities, particularly with Cyrus, to the extent that they described an almost parasocial relationship with Cyrus. Michelle said that out of all of the celebrities she featured in her collage, "She's the one I've known for like, even from when I was younger, I knew her, like. And so whenever I think of her, it's kind of like I've known her for so long, even though I haven't met her in person. It feels like it! It feels like we're friends, kind of." The fact that Gomez and Cyrus were both 18 years old at the time of data collection supports Cook and Kaiser's (2004) notion that the Tween market is characterized by anticipatory enculturation to teenagerdom. As Zollo (1999) stated, advertisers often use older teen actors with whom both younger children and older teens will identify to reach Tween audiences.

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The next-most frequently featured celebrity was Lady Gaga, who appeared in five of the participants' collages. Lady Gaga represented an intriguing media figure for the girls; although a couple of them (Crystal and Lovie) gravitated toward her avant-garde style, the other three girls who placed her image in their collages seemed to do so in order to illustrate a contrast to the normative just-right ideal, claiming that Lady Gaga used "being weird" to get attention. For instance, Fish included a picture of Lady Gaga wearing the infamous "meat" dress in her collage and discussed it in one of her email diaries, in which she said that she thought Lady Gaga was "shocking so you will be interested to try her music." Similarly, Cupcake said that Lady Gaga's hair and makeup look "weird" and that if she could, she would change her appearance to look like "a normal person." Fish's collage clarified the distinction between the just-right ideal and Lady Gaga's deviant "weirdness," as Lady Gaga appeared side-by-side with the girls Fish said are her favorite celebrities, Gomez and Swift. These instances in which girls policed the appearance of a celebrity who flouted normalcy indicate their keen understanding of the contours of the just-right ideal.

The three Black/African-American girls who created photo collages (Crystal, Cupcake, and Christina Morgan) seemed inclined to place images of strong Black/African-American women in their collages in addition to images of Tween celebrities. Although Gomez is half Mexican-American and half Italian-American and Lovato's mother is Mexican-American, they seem to represent what Hasinoff (2008) called the "neutral brownness" of mixed-race media figures, which renders race superficially visible but politically and structurally invisible and transforms racial identity into a malleable commodity that can be manipulated in marketing contexts. The neutral brownness of the Disney Girls did not seem to provide Black/African-American participants with satisfactory representations of women in the media, as they supplemented images in their collages of the Disney Girls with Black/African-American celebrities; Christina Morgan said that the Black/African-American women in her collage were "educational. Because they all have a simple reason in what they're trying to change for people and what they're trying to prove . . . The picture right here [of actress Angela Bassett] tells that we are strong and we can show it." This observation confirms findings in psychological literature (Moradi & Rottenstein 2007) that majority-minority cultural identity conflicts may moderate women and girls' internalization of the thin ideal, or for preadolescent girls, the just-right ideal.

Becoming Celebrity Bodies

In addition to informing an explication of the identities of the figures featured in participants' collages, the follow-up interviews allowed participants to envision who these celebrities were beyond the images captured in their collages. The ZMET facilitated participants' exploration of becoming "celebrity" bodies and provided insight into how they imagined the lives of these paragons of celebrated girlhood. The ZMET also brought out alternative readings of images of women in the media that emphasized traits beyond the embodiment of the just-right ideal.

Participants seemed to understand the nature of the moments in time and space that were captured by the images of their favorite stars, clearly distinguishing between candid and posed pictures. When asked whether there were any photos she wanted to include in her collage but could not find online, Michelle responded, "I wanted to try to find one that was out of that, not, just like them walking around . . . . I couldn't really find one. They're mostly just from photo shoots." Of the slide from her collage, Isabelle said, "I think that the

one of Miley with the microphone [in the center of the collage at left], she was posing for the picture. And I think the one of her before [at right], she was more of, there was thousands of people, and she just picked one way [to look].” Isabelle said that both images of Cyrus depict her wearing “picture makeup,” which Michelle described as when “you have to wear makeup because it looks good on the cameras and things.” Lizzy observed that celebrities wear “picture makeup,” special clothes, and well-coiffed hairstyles “cuz maybe their producers think if they’re not absolutely perfect, nobody will want to see the movie or buy the products.” Although many of the girls expressed a preference for more “natural,” candid pictures, they were well-versed in the contexts in which images of their favorite stars were captured, easily distinguishing between images derived from staged photo shoots, red-carpet events, and paparazzi snapshots.

Some participants also saw these starlets’ appearances as aspirational for girls their age, motivating them and their peers to purchase products promoted by these celebrities. Crystal explicitly correlated the just-right ideal with the ability to purchase products, acknowledging that stars “get the stuff that they want . . . pretty clothes and pretty hair and shoes and they wear all kinds of makeup. Here, we just have clothes and shoes. Not the type of clothes they have.” Conversely, women who appear “ugly” and deviate from the just-right ideal were seen by Kam as lacking the resources required for adequate self-care; of her slide entitled “Ugly People in the Media,” (Figure 1) Kam said, “Probably this one has no money. That one probably has no money, neither does that one. Look at it! Eww! Can’t even tell what gender that thing is.” Isabelle and her friends gave each other makeovers to look

FIGURE 1
Kam’s Collage of ugly people in the media

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more like Gomez and Swift, and she thought that Cyrus's clothing line was very popular among girls her age, stating, "The brand Miley Max is similar clothes that she [Cyrus] wears, and I saw the rack [at the store], it had like one skirt left! There is sometimes a full rack, but usually you can see that it's kind of picked over." Isabelle thought if a person were to give one of her friends who "adores" Swift a thousand dollars, "I think she might spend it all on Taylor Swift stuff." In addition to selling apparel, stationery, music, dance videos, and electronic products (Manila Bulletin, 2008), Cyrus also promotes the Hannah Montana perfume. Swift's position as a Cover Girl cosmetics spokesmodel exemplifies Tweens' anticipatory enculturation into consumption of cosmetics products. One of Swift's first print ads for the company announced that she is "introducing the next generation of beautiful!" laying bare the brand's intention to introduce a new generation of young consumers to Cover Girl via one of their favorite celebrities.

Although participants could clearly envision what it might be like for a girl to be as famous as Gomez or Cyrus, their feelings about this lifestyle were mixed. Some girls voiced envy, such as Kam, who said, "You'd have a lot of money and a lot of fans and a lot of good things in life. Like life would be so easy and happy." Isabelle and her friends wanted to learn how to become celebrities from their idols; "We want to meet them and see how they became famous and how we can become famous just like them. Because we want to be famous, too. Like, we made this video on my iPod where we're going to pretend like we're famous people." Although many of them idolized and followed the celebrities they pictured in their collages as fans, Michelle, Taylor, Melody, Rose, Lovie, Natasha, JBear, and Cupcake voiced reservations about subjecting themselves to the kind of scrutiny that they saw as accompanying celebrity status. For example, Melody thought that fame would be tough to navigate, saying, "I think it would be kind of hard because there's people all around trying to get to you. And um, you don't know if somebody's your friend or not." In this way, participants associated starlets' embodiment of the just-right ideal with the unrelenting presence of the panoptic gaze, which closely resembles the notion of governmentality, in that celebrities must internalize the other's gaze so that they can remain ever-vigilant over their appearances and actions.

In addition to the unconventional images featured in the collages of Black/African-American participants, a handful of girls chose to depict alternative visions of how girls and women in the media appear by highlighting characteristics besides fame and normative ideals of beauty. Entirely eschewing images of the Disney Girls, Rose created a collage (Figure 2) that depicted women and girls who were dressed modestly and who did not wear too much makeup. Rose said, "It was hard to find pictures of women in the magazines that were modest. So what I did if it wasn't modest, I cut off the part that wasn't modest, like here [points to a picture of a woman whose headshot was cropped at the neck]." Rose's selection of images critiqued the notion of the just-right ideal by rejecting the beauty practices required to attain it. Other girls such as JBear challenged the just-right ideal by selecting what she called "natural" images of women who are famous for what they do rather than how they look, including Jane Goodall, Michelle Obama, and Serena Williams.

A few of the girls who included alternative images expressed frustration about the limited diversity of women and girls represented in the media. Christina's stated purpose in creating her collage (Figure 3, which she entitled "My Women/Girls/Babies Collage") was to "show how every single girl in this picture is different from the other girls in the picture." Each slide in Christina's PowerPoint featured women of different ages, races, and body shapes. According to Christina, "They [the media] just show girls who are ordinary . . . how

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FIGURE 2
Rose's Collage

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she can be pretty and stuff, but they actually don't show the girls who are different and who could be ugly and stuff. They don't really show that."

Although Christina expressed feeling as though she needed to lose 70 to 80 pounds at the beginning of the study, through her creative analysis of mediated imagery of women, she gained more comfort with looking different from other girls at school who teased her about her weight:

> Well, actually it [participating in the study] did kind of have a big impact on me because talking about it in my diaries and then actually doing my collage, it changed. Because how people were teasing me, because how I was bigger than them, I kind of didn't really worry about that anymore, because they, I mean, even though I look different than them, I'm not different. So I really didn't care about what they were saying. I kind of just ignored what they said. It actually had a really big impact on it.

Christina arrived at this insight of her own accord, as the email diary questions and collaging task did not involve any specific media literacy pedagogies aside from asking girls to write about and illustrate how they viewed women and girls in the media. However, the responses of Rose, JBear, and Christina to the collaging task suggest that fostering girls' engagement in media criticism can help them explore the interactions between body and image that constitute the process of becoming bodies, giving them permission and creative space to question what kinds of girls are omitted from the media's narrow

FIGURE 3
Christina Morgan's Collage of women, girls, and babies

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conception of celebrated girlhood and to consider what the lives of these idealized girls are like beyond the moments in time captured by the camera.

The Perceived Consequences Associated with (Failing to) Attain the Just-Right Ideal

The participants in this study linked very tangible benefits to the achievement of the just-right ideal by girls and women in the media. In their email diaries, girls were asked to discuss what would happen if a girl looked more like the woman portrayed in the picture they had selected. Of a girl pictured in an image she had selected, Michelle said, "Her life would change because she would make a lot of money. People would treat her differently because she is famous." Isabelle thought that if a girl were to look more like a depiction of Cyrus, "her life would change totally because she would look so pretty and maybe even famous, so she would probably be swarmed by a bunch of people." In her critique of an image of a woman she perceived as wearing "too much" makeup, Cupcake thought that "her life would change. People would treat her more differently than anyone else. They would give her more things and they would treat her really nice by doing what she asked." Erica believed that a girl who looked more like a picture of Gomez that she had chosen to focus on in her email diary "would maybe become more popular or feel better about herself. She might be a happier person from then on out." In this way, Erica translated the social approval and popularity a girl would gain from looking like Gomez into higher self-

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esteem and greater happiness. Both Cupcake and Kam felt as though a woman or girl who subscribed to beauty practices such as wearing makeup and "fancy" clothes would be rewarded with subservience from those around her and attention from boys. It must be noted that girls in the study typically associated approval from boys with acceptance and social capital within their social circles because girls with boyfriends were seen to be more mature and popular than their peers; none of the girls discussed having had a boyfriend at this age.

Understanding girls' interpretations of how celebrities benefit from attaining the just-right ideal is instructive, but it is only through eliciting information from girls about the ramifications of others' judgments of their own embodiment of the just-right ideal that we can see how this anticipated evaluation influences their everyday experiences. Two participants regularly encountered harassment from peers based on their body shapes; Crystal was teased for being what her peers at school perceived as larger than the just-right ideal, and JBear was teased for being what her peers at school perceived as smaller than the just-right ideal. As Crystal described her harassment, "I wish I could be thinner so that people wouldn't talk about me no more and so that I could look good and wear my clothes and not like another type of size . . . They say, 'Look at her and how she looks.'" Even though she was tormented for being what her peers perceived as too thin rather than being too heavy, JBear's description of her harassment by peers resonated with Crystal's:

> Sometimes I wish that I could be a little, I could have a little more meat on my bones . . . One time, during school, I was running laps around our track because I have to run two laps before I can go out on the playground, and um, this big group of girls came over and they grabbed me, and they grabbed my arms, and they started saying 'Look how skinny she is!' and they started making fun of me.

In this way, the discursive contexts of JBear and Crystal's social networks reinforced the influence of the just-right ideal, redoubling its authority in the girls' media and interpersonal environments.

Although from JBear's experience, it is apparent that some girls are ostracized for being thinner than the just-right ideal, the most pernicious punishments were linked to being heavier than the just-right ideal, as girls perceived both physical and social consequences to result from overweight. Several of the participants have learned about the health problems related to obesity from their health and physical education teachers. Echoing several girls, Michelle said, "I don't want to be overweight . . . because like what I learned in PE class, a lot of people who are overweight, they don't have as long of a life. They can get like sicknesses like diabetes easily." For some girls, then, the stigma associated with being overweight stems from an aversion to the health problems associated with obesity that they have learned about through direct observation and from school health curricula.

However, for more participants, the negative consequences linked to being overweight were far more social than physical in nature, as girls perceived those who are overweight as being subject to intense scrutiny and judgment from their peers. Melody poignantly described the social stigmatization from which she perceived overweight students at her school to suffer when she explained that she does not want to be too overweight "because, um, it's harder to be yourself and people could judge you and you can't do all of the things that you would want to do . . . They [other kids] just, they're not really their [overweight kids'] friends as much as they could be. And uh, they don't get to, like, have as many opportunities as some people." Several of the girls related stories of kids at their school who had been ostracized because of their weight; of overweight students at

her school, Christina said that other kids are "mean to them, and they don't treat them very nice." Lizzy thought, "People would probably like them [overweight kids] if they lose weight . . . One girl is like really, really tall, and she's a little overweight, and some people don't really like her." Stacy simply said, "I don't want to be fat. I want to be thin, like everybody else." Stacy's comment reiterates the importance to preadolescent girls of achieving and maintaining a normative body shape, as stigma among one's peer group results from failing to look like "everybody else."

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Conclusions

The pervasive just-right ideal and the Disney Girls who embody it are problematic for several reasons. First, the just-right ideal prescribes rigidly defined standards of body shape and prettiness that limit girls' perceptions of what it means to look like a "normal girl." Although it might be comforting to assume that because girls do not necessarily aspire to the curvaceously thin ideal they are less susceptible to body dissatisfaction, girls' adherence to the delimitations of the just-right ideal must be policed with equal vigilance and discipline, lest they suffer the social and physical penalties they attributed to failing to achieve it. The curvaceously thin and just-right ideals are similarly restrictive; the only difference is what range of body weight their narrow delineations define as normative. Second, the prettiness mandated by the just-right ideal demands the anticipatory enculturation of preadolescent girls to adult beauty practices and purchases, from cosmetics and clothing to hair styling and skin treatments. Participants understood that attaining the prettiness personified by the Disney Girls requires the use of beauty products, and several participants already actively experimented with makeup by performing makeovers on their friends to emulate the appearances of their favorite celebrities. Finally, the just-right ideal embodied by the Disney Girls models self-objectification, as participants' imagination about what it might be like to be famous centered on how the panoptic gaze of the paparazzi and fans trained upon the Disney Girls must constrain the lives of their favorite celebrities. For the participants, achieving celebrity girlhood status was closely connected to being monitored by fans and foes alike.

Although girls who articulated greater levels of criticism toward mediated imagery also expressed less interest in consuming beauty products, even girls who admired celebrities embodying the just-right ideal voiced reservations about the lifestyle they associated with the Disney Girls. This continuum of interpretation complicates binary notions of how preadolescent girls either accept or reject media texts and images. Preadolescent girls participating in this study enjoyed media images while also expressing criticism of those media and uncertainties about integrating the beauty practices mandated by those media into their own body images. These preadolescent girls understood the expectations prescribed by mediated anticipatory enculturation, but they were not yet fully invested in or able to enact beauty practices in their lives. This liminal stage of development between preadolescent girls' understanding and manifestation of the just-right ideal is fruitful ground for future research, education, and conversations within families and social groups about beauty, body image, and the media.

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