

TEASING AND ITS LONG-TERM
EFFECTS ON BODY
IMAGE

by

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of the current research is to determine whether teasing by families has more of an influence on an individual's body image than teasing by peers. Teasing is one of several factors that influence a person's body image, and much research has focused on the significant long-term effects produced by teasing at an early age. This research explores exactly how teasing by family members and peers contributes to body dissatisfaction and negative body image. The research utilizes social comparison theory in order to determine how an individual's body image is influenced by close family members and peers.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who supported me along the way and helped me accomplish this piece of work. I would like to thank all of my friends and family members who encouraged me to continue when I felt like giving up. Thank you to all my mentors and everyone else who guided me throughout the process of writing this thesis.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

a Cronbach's index of internal consistency

ANOVA Analysis of variance

df Degree of freedom

f Frequency

H Hypothesis

M Mean (Arithmetic average)

n Number in a subsample

N Total number in a sample

p Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as more extreme than the observed value

SD Standard deviation

r Pearson product –moment correlation

RQ Research question

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Teasing and Its Long-Term Effects on Body Image.

Teasing is known to affect the way people feel about themselves. This paper displays how social comparison theory can be used to explore how teasing impacts body image. In particular, ample research demonstrates the effects of teasing on an individual's body image. The literature below discusses what has been researched so far in regards to teasing and body image. The literature also examines how women develop comparisons to others based on body image. In this thesis, I studied the effects of teasing by family members on an individual's body image from a quantitative perspective. The overall research question is: Does teasing from family members affect a person's body image more than teasing from peers? The method used for this thesis is an attitudinal survey using college-aged students as subjects, which will be done through The University of Alabama. Because family and peers have a significant influence on an individual's body image, the subjects were asked questions pertaining to their attitudes about how they feel they were affected by the teasing of close relatives and peers. I utilized the social scientific theory known as social comparison theory to explore how teasing can affect an individual.

Background on Body Image.

Many adolescent girls and boys are exposed to the idea of what is considered attractive through images presented by the media. Young girls spend a lot of time trying

to conform to this idea of attractiveness. In fact, Scheiner (2001) states that “it seems that half the time of our adolescent girls is spent trying to meet their new responsibilities to be sexy, glamorous and attractive” (p. 90-1). Because eating disorders cause severe illness and sometimes even death in individuals hoping to obtain the “perfect body,” it is important to discuss the two major types of eating disorders that can significantly affect an individual’s life. The two main eating disorders that often develop among individuals because of a negative body image are known as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Anorexia nervosa is defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as “an intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat, even though underweight” (p. 589). Bulimia nervosa is often used to refer to an individual who “might use radical compensatory behaviors, such as vomiting, to reduce anxiety about weight gain consequent to overeating” (Stice, 2004, p. 305). Benas and Gibb (2008) point out that “eating disorders are characterized by behaviors such as extreme restrictive or uninhibited eating and preoccupation with eating, weight, and shape” (p. 143). Individuals with anorexia and/or bulimia often have dysfunctional attitudes toward food, which is why eating disorders often become a way of life for some individuals. Eating disorders often lead to body dissatisfaction or a negative body image, which typically occurs when an individual is considered overweight.

Thompson et al. (1995) state that “regarding weight status, higher levels of body dissatisfaction have been noted in adolescents who are overweight according to standard height/weight charts, or who rate themselves as being overweight” (p. 222). Age has also been a factor in determining body dissatisfaction. Females who mature quickly have been known to have a lower level of body dissatisfaction than those who mature at a later

age. There is a significant amount of research (Thompson et al., 1995 & Phillips, 1986) that suggests women who are teased as children are more likely to have a negative body image. There is also a link between depression and negative body image, which are the factors that ultimately lead to eating disordered behaviors (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2004). Research has shown that eating disturbance and body image are often strongly related. Because a person's body shape and the attitude a person has about his or her body are so important in whether or not a negative body image develops, it is important to determine whether or not there is a correlation between the two. Therefore, my first research question is:

RQ1: Is there a correlation between a person's attitudes about body shape and the attitudes a person has toward his or her appearance?

Body image is an issue that is common among many cultures. Thompson et al. (1995) point out that "Seventy percent of American girls and 48% of Spanish female adolescents want to be thinner than their current size" (p. 221-2). They also point out that many females in various cultures would like to weigh less than their current weight. There are many factors that contribute to body image, including the current weight of an individual, marital status, and being teased as a child. Body image dissatisfaction, as a result of being teased about size or weight, can have long-term negative effects on individuals. Though we know teasing can affect body image, social comparison theory may help explain why teasing has such a significant affect on an individual.

Social Comparison Theory.

The society in which individuals live has a major impact on how human beings view themselves and how cultural values influence individual values and behavior. This

is often examined through social comparison theory. Social comparison theory argues that people view other people's images as obtainable and realistic, and subsequently, make comparisons among themselves, others, and the idealized images (Festinger, 1954). This process takes place especially when people are uncertain about their own characteristics. This theory also points out that a person's ambition will increase upon success with a task he or she expects to execute successfully and will decrease with a failure to perform at the expected level of aspiration (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). If an individual is uncertain about his or her own characteristics he or she may look to others for comparison. If society values attractiveness in its members and thinness is considered attractive, then individuals will value thinness as being attractive in themselves and others. Research on teasing and body image conducted by Thompson, Coovert, and Stormer (1999) discovered the role of appearance-related social comparison processes as a logical link between developmental factors and body dissatisfaction. If a person is obsessed with obtaining a thin body, failure to have a thin body will result in feelings of low self-esteem. Individuals who make comparisons on the basis of physical appearance are more likely to develop an eating disorder and have a negative body image.

Richins (1991) suggested that humans have a need to compare themselves with others through their abilities, attitudes, and appearance. Our identity is often formed by defining ourselves in opposition to someone or something else. Richins' main points include the effect of pressure to conform to societal views of attractiveness and how that pressure operates in regards to developing the "perfect body." Researchers have also found that the general tendency to compare oneself with others is what plays a critical

role in body image dissatisfaction (Vincent & McCabe, 2000). Morrison, Kalin, and Morrison (2004) point out that “female participants who considered celebrities an important comparison group were more likely to engage in pathological weight control practices such as vomiting to lose weight than those who considered celebrities to be unimportant” (p. 575). If a person perceives that a thin body is desirable, that individual may attempt to obtain that idealized body size, which is done either healthily or unhealthily. This idea of females comparing themselves to other females in the media and trying to obtain what is considered the “perfect body” is consistent with upward comparison as described in social comparison theory.

If an individual compares himself or herself to someone who is perceived as better looking, the result is an upward comparison. Conversely, when someone compares themselves to an individual who is perceived as less attractive, it is considered a downward comparison (Breseman, 2004). An upward comparison typically makes a person feel bad about himself or herself because the comparison is to someone perceived as superior in some way, whereas a downward comparison results in feeling good about oneself because the comparison is with someone perceived as inferior in some way. Social comparisons, in terms of physical appearance, are often expected of an individual because people occasionally use the appearance of others in order to evaluate their own appearance (Breseman, 2004). Because individuals tend to look to others to determine their own level of attractiveness, targets of comparison are an important aspect in determining how people feel about themselves.

The body image of an individual is developed during adolescence. Negative body image issues often develop from being teased as a child. Kostanski and Gullone (2006)

point out that “one important normative social value, which appears to be associated with developmental issues is that of body image” (p. 308). Appearance-based social comparison often mediates the effect of appearance-related teasing on body image and eating disturbance. Teasing during childhood and adolescence typically concerns body or appearance and social comparisons often occur with others who may have a better or worse bodily appearance. Maine and Kelly (2005) discuss how body image development is a lifelong process significantly influenced by the people who are close to us and those who play the most central roles in our lives. Because families and peers also obtain an idea of attractiveness through society, they often use this idea of attractiveness to tease an individual. Social comparisons regarding appearance are often expected from everyone; therefore it is unsurprising that family members and peers use social comparisons to tease an individual about his or her body image. Because social comparison is seen as one of the ways a person develops a negative body image, it is important to examine how teasing by family members and peers affects an individual's body image.

Chapter 2

Discussion of Teasing and Body Image

Teasing and Body Image.

One possible social interaction that may directly affect one's body image development is teasing in childhood and adolescence. Current research suggests that interpersonal factors have a significant impact on the development of body image (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2004). The way family members and peers tease an individual about his or her physical appearance definitely has an impact on how that person feels about his or her body. Rieves and Cash (1996) suggested at least three possible reasons for formation of negative body image development: social teasing, social comparison, and maternal modeling. Teasing is an issue with which most people can identify. Pawluck (1989) defines teasing as a generally "annoying, harassing, or irritating occurrence done in sport or mischief; and... is typically of a trifling or petty nature" (p. 146). Teasing involves social interaction between the person being teased and the one who is doing the teasing. The dichotomy of teasing sometimes makes it hard to explore because it can be seen as either humorous or abusive. Breseman (2004) discusses how teasing may appear to be humorous or even harmless but in reality may be seen as an insult. Breseman (2004) states that "teasing may be a 'safe' or socially acceptable way to express anger without showing overt signs of anger or aggression" (p. 22). Since teasing occurs among most individuals throughout childhood, it is sometimes believed that teasing is something that is natural to be endured.

Some scholars note that teasing can be a positive, enjoyable interaction for the participants. Keltner et al. (2001) discusses how teasing can be positive and can be used to socialize and interact with people in a playful way. Keltner et al. (2001) also points out that although many forms of teasing refer to an aggressive component, teasing is not always done in an aggressive manner. Alberts' (1992) definition of teasing refers to how teasing can be used in a positive way and states that "a tease may be profitably viewed as an *aggressive verbalization* couched in some situational qualifiers indicating playfulness" (p. 233, author's italics). It is sometimes viewed as fun or playful and can even be used as a way people express affection between one another.

Given the complexity of teasing, it should not be surprising that there are several different definitions of teasing. Different types of teasing often have different effects on an individual. Teasing is often hard to define because it refers to diverse behaviors and can sometimes be confused with bullying. Benas and Gibb (2006) discuss how teasing and bullying can negatively affect an individual and state that "teasing and related constructs such as verbal victimization and emotional abuse may contribute risk to a variety of disorders" (p. 144). Another definition of teasing is given by Mills and Babrow (2003) who state that "teasing is a pervasive communicative act designed to achieve social influence in almost any type of interaction" (p. 273). It can be used as a communicative tool between individuals in almost any type of situation. The main difference between teasing and bullying is that teasing can sometimes have a positive impact on someone and bullying is always negative. Teasing and bullying can also be devastating to the teased person and the consequences of this victimization can be detrimental to the victim's emotional and psychological well being (Ross, 1996).

Teasing has also become more prevalent over time. For instance, weight-related teasing has increased because society now places greater importance on the idea that thinness is considered attractive.

Despite the potential positive benefits of teasing, when it comes to body image issues and teasing, the picture has been bleak. The studies linking teasing to body image demonstrate that teasing has been a being a strong predictor of body dissatisfaction, and it has an even more negative impact on those who are already self-conscious about their bodies (Levine & Smolak, 2004, p. 80). The nature and intent of teasing tends to influence the recipient's body image. In American society, the ideal standard of beauty includes being thin. As people are teased about their bodies, they are engaging in social comparison with the teasers and with the "role models" that they are compared to during the teasing episodes. Furthermore, an obese child or adolescent may be a more likely to be teased based on body size than their thinner peers (Jones et al., 1995). The impact of the stigma of obesity in American society and the apparent high tolerance for obesity prejudice and discrimination may play a role in influencing effects of teasing on self-esteem and body image.

As mentioned earlier, teasing has a major influence on an individual's self-perception, and research suggests that people are greatly concerned with the way members of the opposite sex view them. Because there is so much emphasis placed on being attractive, many people believe it is important to be of an acceptable weight because they feel as though they are more likely to be accepted by society. Tantleff-Dunn and Gokee (2004) point out that "numerous studies suggest that people ascribe a variety of negative attributes to individuals they perceive as unattractive and/or

overweight” (p. 113). This further suggests that teasing has a significant influence on an individual’s body image. Because interpersonal factors play such an important role in someone’s body image, it is extremely important to examine the negative effects teasing can have on a person, as well as how peers and family members greatly influence a person’s body image.

Being teased about body image can have significant negative effects on a person. Jones et al. (2005) state that “teasing has been linked to negative emotions, low self-esteem, depression, suicide ideation, and suicide” (p. 422). There is also significant evidence that supports the idea that being thin is considered to be more attractive than being overweight. Because of this factor, it is very likely for those who are overweight to be teased. Research has shown that those who are teased have higher levels of body dissatisfaction, as well as low self-esteem. Ergo, weight-related teasing often has significant consequences. A great deal of evidence exists to support the notion that body weight is an important component of both male and female attractiveness (Swami et al., 2008). Individuals obtain a negative body image from being teased about their weight and are stigmatized for being overweight, which goes back to the fact that society puts a large focus on being thin. Stigmas are often socially constructed and can differ among societies, especially in regards to thinness.

Phillips (1986) also discusses how teasing affects an individual’s body image. She states that the “degree of body image disturbance more generally has been shown to be related to teasing history” (p. 178). Research done by Thompson (1995) also suggests that women who report being teased during adolescence have a more negative body image as an adult. It was also likely that individuals with eating disorders are teased

during adolescence. Phillips (1986) also points out that “teasing was causally related not only to general psychological dysfunction but also to body dissatisfaction” (p. 178). Because teasing is strongly correlated with an individual having a negative body image, it is important to further discuss the affects teasing has on an individual.

Teasing is often done by those who are closest to the person being teased. The person being teased about his or her body image will most likely believe the statements are true because the statements are coming from someone close to the individual. The style of teasing often changes depending on the age of the teaser and the person being teased. Kostanski and Gullone (2006) state the three different types of teasing include “hurtful; mean; and symbolic” (p. 308). Now that teasing has been defined, it is important to examine the research conducted on teasing by peers and teasing by family members.

Teasing By Peers.

Not only are individuals affected by teasing itself, but the effect that teasing has on an individual also depends upon who is doing the teasing. Kostanski and Gullone (2006) state “adolescents’ experiences of being teased about their weight by their friends was recognized as a form of being taunted, the adolescents frequently took these taunts as reflecting a truth about themselves” (p. 308). Because friends have such a major influence on how people perceive themselves, it is important to examine the role of interpersonal relationships on the development of a person’s body image. Jones et al. (2005) state that “teasing by peers is recognized as a common yet challenging aspect of the adolescent experience at school” (p. 421). Teasing about appearance has been shown in many research studies to be the most common reason for teasing. Jones et al. (2005)

also point out that “concern with acceptance and social changes within friendships and peer groups have made teasing within peer interactions especially salient and likely to occur” (p. 421).

The influence of peer groups can affect an individual greatly, especially during adolescence. For example, peers have often been identified as the main people who do the teasing. One of the main reasons people are teased during adolescence is because of issues related to body image (Breseman, 2004). Peers can influence an individual’s perception of themselves through teasing about physical appearance. Tantleff-Dunn and Gokee (2004) discuss how much of an influence teasing has on body image and state that “peers and friends are among the most frequent and ‘worst’ perpetrators of teasing, second only to brothers” (p. 110). Being teased about body image often leads to a greater concern about physical appearance, as well as being more attentive to dieting behaviors. Because teasing has such negative effects, it is important to examine the negative effects of teasing.

In relation to being teased by peers, Tantleff-Dunn and Gokee (2004) discuss how teasing differs among adolescent girls and boys. They state that “studies have found that girls more often than boys believe that thinness increases likeability, and the extent to which this belief is held predicts weight and body image concerns” (p. 110). Research has also found that girls in middle school are more likely to report engaging in body image and weight related interactions than boys. These interactions among young females often lead to body weight and shape concerns later in life. They point out, is that boys were more likely to view feedback from female friends as having a positive impact on body image, and feedback from male friends was used to influence eating and exercise

patterns. Because of the extensive research that suggests that teasing by peers will result in negative body image, it is important to examine in this thesis. This leads to the first hypothesis of this study that states the following:

H1: High levels of exposure to peer teasing as a youth will be related to greater concerns about body shape and appearance.

In addition to examining how teasing by peers influence an individual's self-perception, it is also necessary to examine how teasing by family members influences an individual's self-perception.

Teasing By Family Members.

Individuals are significantly affected by the feedback they get from family members, which is why being teased about one's body image often leads to a negative body image. Teasing may also be one method used by parents to prepare their children to survive in the world, to sharpen children's skills or teach them how to defend themselves (Ross, 1996). In many ways, our personal body image is an image that is created by family and culture. If an individual lives within a family that places a substantial amount of significance on body image, that individual tends to internalize the negative, critical attitudes about body image, making it hard to escape with a positive body image of oneself. Research suggests that family members also play a major role in how an individual views his or her body. A study of body image by Schwartz, Phares, Tantleff-Dunn, and Thompson (1999) revealed correlations between parent's teasing about weight and daughter's body image, such that the greater the occurrence of teasing, the lower the daughter's body image.

Furthermore, studies have shown that parents' attitudes and behaviors in regard to their own body image are correlated with body image in their adolescent children (Levine & Smolak, 2004). If a parent finds his or her own body unattractive, it makes the parent more likely to find their child's body unattractive, which often leads to teasing about body image. Levine and Smolak (2004) point out that most parents think their children are physically attractive, but parents tend to criticize their children about appearance more during adolescence. They also state that "direct comments about body, weight, and eating are more potent sources of parental influence" (p. 81). Because teasing by family members sometimes occurs throughout an individual's life, it is important to examine in this study. This leads to the second hypothesis of this study that states the following:

H2: Based on the reviewed literature, it was hypothesized that high levels of exposure to family teasing as a youth will be related to greater concerns about body shape and appearance.

The teasing done by family members often has long-term effects on body image. Research also suggests that teasing by brothers about body image has a significant impact on an individual's self-perception (Ross, 1996). Because family and friends have such a significant impact on an individual's body image, it is important to study whether or not teasing from family members has more of an impact on an individual than teasing by peers. This leads to the second research question in this study which asks the following:

RQ2: Does teasing from family members affect a person's attitudes about his or her appearance and his or her body shape more than teasing from peers?

Research has also shown that girls who were teased by family members are actually at a higher risk for body dissatisfaction and eating disturbance than those who

were not teased by family members as a child. Because a person may or may not be able to control his or her weight, if someone is teased for being overweight, depression is likely to occur (Levine & Smolak, 2004). Girls who were teased about their weight were more likely to engage in unhealthy activities, such as bingeing and purging, as well as starvation. Keery et al. (2005) states that “other studies indicate that that appearance-related teasing is significantly related to body dissatisfaction, eating disturbance, weight concerns, drive for thinness, and suicidal ideation and attempts” (p. 121). Keery et al. (2005) also points out that “it is important to note that the effect of parental comments on the child was found to be more harmful when both parents commented on a child’s weight” (p. 121). These females also demonstrated higher levels of social comparison and the internalization of the idea of thinness presented by society. Yet, there is also some research on males and the relationships with body image and communication.

There are many indications that body dissatisfaction in boys and men is becoming increasingly common among American society. The reasons behind males developing a negative body image are seen to be the same as the reasons for women developing a negative body image. Corsen and Andersen (2004) state point out that these major factors are “concern with physical appearance, popularity, and attractiveness to the opposite sex” (p. 194). Research has shown that male appearance is important from an early age, which is often continued into adulthood (Corsen & Andersen, 2004). According to Pope (2000), men want to change their weight, as do women, but are often even more preoccupied with body shape and muscularity. Pope (2000) also suggests that teasing during adolescence is a major reason why males want to change their physical appearance. Males are often judged by physical appearance, just like females, which can

result in teasing if the male target does not meet societal standards of physical attractiveness (Corsen & Andersen, 2004).

Contrary to popular belief, current research suggests that males also suffer from negative body image. More recent research has shown that body image, in particular negative attitudes towards one's body is also prevalent among males (Kostanski & Gullone, 2004). Thompson et al. (1995) argued that this is likely to happen when the teasing relates to sensitive topics such as shape or weight. However, Kostanski and Gullone (2004) point out that research does indicate that being underweight is a serious concern for some young men. Body image dissatisfaction among men is very prevalent in American society, with current literature identifying this concept as a 'drive for muscularity' (McCreary & Sasse, 2000). This new concept of males suffering from body dissatisfaction is sometimes a result of teasing males endure throughout adolescence. The fact that being either under or overweight elicits teasing behavior, especially for boys is important to note. Research suggests that there are strong socio-cultural pressures for boys to be strong and muscular (McCreary & Sasse, 2000), with being perceived as thin appearing to result in just as much teasing as being overweight for males. Therefore, the third research question for this thesis is:

RQ3: Does teasing both from family members and peers affect the body image and body shape attitudes differently for males and females?

Because of the link between teasing and body image, Thompson et al. (1995) developed the "formation of a negative verbal commentary hypothesis for the development of body dissatisfaction, eating disturbance, and general psychological distress" (p. 222). Several studies have investigated whether or not emotional abuse as a

child about a person's weight has an influence on how they view their body as they get older. Benas and Gibb (2008) hypothesized that "current dysfunctional cognitions concerning eating, weight, and shape would mediate the link between childhood victimization and current symptoms of eating disorders" (p. 145). Additionally, when discussing both emotional abuse and teasing, it should be noted that the content of the teasing might ultimately determine whether or not the child will be seriously affected by the teasing.

Chapter 3

Research Questions

The research in this thesis focuses on utilizing social comparison theory to explain the relationship between teasing and body image issues for young adults. The current research proposed three central research questions, and two hypotheses.

RQ1: Is there a correlation between a person's attitudes body shape and the attitudes a person has toward his or her appearance?

H1: High levels of exposure to peer teasing as a youth will be related to greater concerns about body shape and appearance.

H2: Based on the reviewed literature, it was hypothesized that high levels of exposure to family teasing as a youth will be related to greater concerns about body shape and appearance.

RQ2: Does teasing from family members affect a person's attitudes about his or her appearance and his or her body shape more than teasing from peers?

RQ3: Does teasing both from family members and peers affect the body image and body shape attitudes differently for males and females?

Because of the literature that suggests that teasing can lead to negative body image in males and females, the three research questions proposed in this thesis are of significant importance.

As discussed in the next chapter, there are four different measurement scales that will be used to determine the results for the above research questions. The four scales

used to collect data for the current research questions were used because they produce valid and reliable results. Current research suggests that family and peer teasing are related to negative body image, which is why the above hypotheses will be examined in this study. Through use of a survey, the research collected data from college students about their attitudes in order to determine how teasing is related to body image.

Chapter 4

Method

Participants.

The research for this thesis was done through the use of an analytical survey. This analytical survey examined how college students viewed themselves in terms of body shape and physical appearance. This survey examined the relationship between the characteristics and attitudes an individual had about himself or herself. It was better to use an analytical survey, as opposed to a descriptive survey, because this study did not attempt to describe beliefs or attitudes about appearance to a population. The sample used for this survey was a convenience sample, which limits the external validity of the survey. The various questionnaires used in this study explored the impact of weight-related teasing on college students throughout their childhood and adolescence. The questionnaires in the survey also explored how teasing is related to body shape and beliefs about appearance.

The current study is particularly interested in the college population. Students from a large southeastern university were asked to participate. The study included 149 undergraduate participants (N = 149). The questionnaires were put into a survey, which was posted on the Survey Monkey Website. Course bonus points were given to the students who successfully completed the survey, at the discretion of the instructor. The students who did not wish to participate were not obligated and received other methods of

obtaining course bonus points. In certain courses, participating in research was a required component of the course.

The study sample population included both male (28.9%) and female (71.1%) students. The average age of the participants was 19.84 years old ($SD = 2.82$), with the range being 17-34 years. The study was extended to all ethnicities. Reported ethnicities included: 11.4% African American ($n = 17$), Asian American ($n = 1$), 84.6% Caucasian ($n = 126$), Hispanic ($n = 1$), and Other ($n = 4$). The average weight for male participants was 177 pounds and the average height of male participants was 6 feet. The average weight for female participants was 137 pounds and the average height of female participants was 5 feet and 5 inches.

Measurement Scales.

The research used four different measurement scales to determine how teasing is related to body image. Appendices A through D offer a list of the questions used in the survey. The participants of this study answered questions pertaining to being teased as a child. The survey also included questions that focused on body image and eating habits. Measures included: Beliefs About Appearance Scale, Body Shape Questionnaire, Perceptions of Teasing Scale (for family members), and a Perceptions of Teasing Scale (for peers). In addition, demographic questions were included so the sample could be described fully.

Appearance scales to assess body image were included in this study to examine respondents' scores regarding their appraisal of how they felt about their appearance and how important it was to them. To determine how an individual views his or her appearance, the Beliefs About Appearance Body Scale; this is also known as a BAAS.

This scale “measures dysfunctional attitudes about one’s bodily appearance, specifically the perceived consequences of appearance for relationships, achievement, feelings, and self-view” (Benas & Gibb, 2008, p. 148). Benas and Gibb (2008) also state that “the specific dysfunctional attitudes measured are hypothesized to be common in eating disorders and contribute to restrictive eating patterns and a critical view of the body” (p. 149). For the BAAS, which asked questions pertaining towards on individual’s attitudes about how appearance affects the success of their personal lives, the scale asked participants to indicate to what degree they agree with 20 statements on a five-point scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Responses to each statement were given a score from 1 to 5. A score of 1 meant that an individual strongly agreed that appearance is an important characteristic of success in one’s life. A score of 5 meant that an individual was not as concerned about physical appearance. The scores were then summed to determine the score for each response to the questionnaire. Scores from the statements were combined to provide an assessment of beliefs about appearance. Low scores indicate that participants place more emphasis on appearance. The lowest score possible for the BAAS was 5 and the highest possible score for the BAAS was 100 because there were 20 questions with the highest possible score for each question being 5. In this study, the average score for BAAS was 37.69 ($SD = 12.91$). Internal consistency measured with Cronbach’s alpha was .915.

Another type of scale used to assess an individual’s body image is the Body Shape Questionnaire, also known as the BSQ. Benas and Gibb (2008) point out that this scale is a “34-item self-report questionnaire used to assess concerns about weight and body shape, specifically how the subject has been feeling about his/her appearance over

the past 4 weeks” (p. 148). The BSQ is often used to measure body image because of its high reliability. Benas and Gibb (2008) state that “the BSQ has high retest reliability and strong concurrent validity with measures of self-evaluation, body checking, and avoidance behavior” (p. 149). Responses were rated on a five-point response format (*1=Strongly Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree*). Higher scores on the BSQ meant less concern about shape and a more positive body image. The scores from each question were averaged to determine an overall score for the BSQ scale. The lowest possible score for the BSQ was 1 and the highest score for the BSQ was 5. The average score computed on the BSQ scale was 3.45 ($SD = .84$). The internal consistency of the measure (Cronbach’s alpha) was .97.

An additional scale that was used to assess an individual’s perceptions of teasing about appearance is the Teasing about Appearance Scale; also known as POTS. This scale was first administered through Thompson et al. (1995). The POTS is a 22-item Likert-type instrument that assesses the content and affective impact of an individual’s history of being teased (Thompson et al., 1995). The POTS is comprised of two subscales, Weight-Related Teasing (WT) and Competency Teasing (CT). Questions 1-6 were based on weight-related teasing and questions 7-11 were based on competency teasing. The POTS also includes a subjective assessment of teasing effect (e.g., “How upset were you by the teasing?”). The scale was administered twice. One scale focused on how individuals were teased as a child by their close family members. The internal consistency of the measure for weight related teasing (.866) and for general competence (.875) were tested with Cronbach’s alpha. The second administration of the scale focused on how individuals were teased as a child by peers. Internal consistency (Cronbach’s

alpha) was .860 for the weight-related subscale of the POTS peer scale. = .882 for the competency teasing subscale of the POTS peer scale. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale (*1=Strongly Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree*). A score for the POTS was created by averaging the response to each version of the scale. An average was computed for the 11 family items and then a second score was computed for the 11 peer items. The lowest possible score for these two scales was 1 and the highest possible score was 5. The average score computed for the POTS scale was 4.04 (*SD = .64*). The average score computed on the POTS weight-related subscale 4.52 (*SD = .67*). The average score computed on the POTS competency teasing subscale was 3.64 (*SD = .91*). The purpose of this scale was to determine how being teased by other individuals affects the way an individual perceives themselves.

Procedure.

All participation occurred through an online survey developed and administered on the Survey Monkey Web site. Students were recruited through e-mail. The e-mail stated that completion of the survey would provide them credit points in their class if they completed the survey. Students in the survey were first recruited, and then followed a link that took them online to the Survey Monkey Web site and take the survey. The survey duration was an estimated 10-15 minutes. The last page of the survey was a debriefing page, which explained that if the instrument and the survey process caused participants to reflect on tough past experiences, resources were available on campus to help them. The page included information that allowed students to seek out counseling services provided through campus resources. The phone number and Website for those campus resources were listed on introductory page of the survey.

Chapter 5

Results

This study was concerned with the relationships between body image issues, as reflected in attitudes about appearance and body shape, and teasing by family and peers. It was also concerned with sex differences that may emerge in attitudes toward body image.

The first research question asked: Is there a correlation between a person's attitudes body shape and the attitudes a person has toward their appearance? To answer this question, a bivariate correlation using Pearson's r was conducted on the Beliefs About Appearance Scale (BAAS) score and the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) score. To recap, lower BAAS scores indicated a higher greater concern about the role of their appearance in their lives and lower BSQ scores also indicated greater concern about their body shape. Using a 2-tailed Pearson correlation, the results indicate that there is a significant, strong positive relationship between BAAS and BSQ ($r = .549, p < .001$). A correlation was also run to determine whether this relationship was the same for men and women in the sample. To determine whether or not the correlation between the BAAS and BSQ varies by sex, a bivariate correlation was run first for men and then for women. Table 1 shows that there is a difference in the strength of the correlation. The relationship between these two variables was stronger for women than it was for men. For both men and women, however, the relationship between BSQ and BAAS was both

strong and statistically significant. This means that as a person’s concern about appearance increases, their concern about body shape also increases. The results indicated that there is a direct correlation between the BSQ for men and women, but for women the relationship is stronger (Men $r = .450$, Women $r = .613$). People, especially women, who have higher concerns about their shape also have higher concerns about their appearance impacting their social relationships and daily lives.

Table 1: Correlation between attitudes about appearance and body shape, by sex

	<i>BAAS/BSQ</i>	<i>Significance</i>
	<i>Correlation</i>	
Men	.450	$p < .002$
Women	.613	$p < .001$
Overall	.549	$p < .001$

The literature on teasing from peers and family on body image lead to the two hypotheses, which were tested with scores on the POTS by Peers and Family. Hypothesis 1 predicted that high levels of peer teasing as a youth and as a young adult are related to greater concerns about appearance and body shape, and thus negative body image. Hypothesis 2 predicted that high levels of family teasing as a youth are related to higher concerns on both variables, and thus negative body image. To test these hypotheses, and Research Question 2, which asked whether peer or family teasing was more related to these concerns, regression analyses were used with the teasing measures as the predictor variables and the appearance and shape attitude concerns as the second

measures. These two hypotheses were related to RQ2, which asked whether teasing from family members affect a person’s body image more than teasing from peers.

As Table 2 shows, significant models emerged for both BAAS scores and BSQ scores when the teasing scores were loaded in as predictor variables. However, although Hypothesis 1 was supported, indicating that teasing from peers was significantly related to the body image variables, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. For the beliefs about appearance (BAAS) score, there was no relationship between teasing by family and attitudes. The effect of teasing by family was weak for the body shape (BSQ) score.

Table 2: Regression analyses examining the relationship between teasing by peers and family on attitudes toward appearance and body shape

<i>Teasing</i>	<i>BAAS Beta</i>	<i>BSQ Beta</i>
	<i>Standardized</i>	<i>Standardized</i>
By family	.123	.181+
By peers	.203*	.279**
R Square	.298	.419
Adjusted R Square	.089	.179
F =	7.1 ***	15.51***

+p < .1* p < .05; ** p < .01, ***p < .001.

For the BSQ score, a stronger relationship overall was found for both types of teasing on body image. In short, teasing by family mattered somewhat for the attitudes

toward body shape, but teasing by family members was not related to the appearance attitudes. Teasing by peers clearly was the driving force for variation in both of these attitudes. So despite the fact that family teasing may have had a weak role in attitudes about body shape, family teasing was not a factor in attitudes about the role of appearance in a person's life. Therefore H1 was supported, H2 was not, and RQ2 established that peers play more important a role than family in the variation of these attitudes. As teasing by peers went up, individuals had greater concerns about their body shape and their appearance affecting their lives.

To answer RQ3, which asked if teasing affects body images issues differently for males and females, regression analyses were run using the teasing measures coupled with sex as the independent variables on the body attitude scores. It was assumed that men would have lower concerns overall than women on both the appearance (BAAS) and body shape (BSQ) scores, and therefore sex needed to be controlled for in these relationships. Through t-tests, it was established that men indeed had significantly lower concerns about appearance and body shape.

Therefore, the regressions were run with teasing and sex on the attitude scores. As Table 3 indicates for the BSQ, sex was the strongest predictor of variation in BSQ ($r^2 = .331$, $p < .01$, $F = 23.90$). As noted above, men had lower concerns about their body shape and body shape concerns increased for women. But even factoring in sex, teasing by peers still remained strongly and positively related to concerns about body shape. In this model, family teasing emerged as a significant predictor of body shape concerns as well. Therefore, sex (being a woman) and high levels of teasing both from family and

peers lead to greater concerns about body shape, and therefore, negative body image. However, the same was not true for the BAAS scores ($r^2 = .093$, $p < .001$, $F = 4.98$).

Table 3: Regression analyses examining effects of teasing and sex on attitudes toward appearance and body shape

<i>Teasing</i>	<i>BAAS</i>	<i>BSQ</i>
By family	.127	.201*
By peers	.195 ⁺	.232*
Sex (1 = Male; 2 = Female)	-.70	-.396***
R Square	.093	.331
Adjusted R Square	.075	.317
F =	4.98**	23.90***

⁺ $p < .1$ * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Chapter 6

Discussion

The purpose of the research was to investigate the correlation of the negative effects of teasing between both family members and peers on an individual. The research focused on the young adult population because of the prevalence of negative body image experienced by many young adults. It was also important to focus on young adults because of the relationships they have with family members and peers. Based on previous scholarship, the research posed three central research questions and two hypotheses.

RQ1: Is there a correlation between a person's attitudes about body shape and the attitudes a person has toward his or her appearance?

H1: High levels of exposure to peer teasing as a youth will be related to greater concerns about body shape and appearance.

H2: Based on the reviewed literature, it was hypothesized that high levels of exposure to family teasing as a youth will be related to greater concerns about body shape and appearance.

RQ2: Does teasing both from family members affect a person's attitudes about his or her appearance and his or her body shape more than teasing from peers?

RQ3: Does teasing both from family members and peers affect the body image and body shape attitudes differently for males and females?

Using an online survey with participants answering questions about teasing and body image, the research was used to determine the long-term effects of teasing by family members and peers on an individual.

The first research question demonstrates that there is indeed a relationship between a person's attitudes about his or her body shape and the attitudes that he or she has about his or her beliefs about appearance. This is an important finding because it reminds us that feelings that a person has about his or her body do not exist in isolation. Social comparison theory rests on the premise that people evaluate their own levels of attractiveness by comparing themselves to others (Richins, 1991). The results for RQ1 seem logical in a culture in which the stigma of obesity is prevalent. Because overweight individuals are often alienated by society, a likely explanation for the relationships of body image evaluation and perceptions of teasing may be that respondents are aware of the stigma against overweight individuals and realize the unpopularity of being overweight or obese (Corsen & Andersen, 2004).

This particular study focused on teasing from family members and teasing from peers and how it affects an individual's body image. The following hypotheses tested revealed a strong positive relationship between teasing by family members and peers and body dissatisfaction and the BAAS score and BSQ score. Therefore, higher body dissatisfaction was associated with lower appearance evaluation (body image) scores. Hypothesis 1 asked if high levels of exposure to peer teasing as a youth will be related to greater concerns about body shape and appearance. Given the first finding, it is not surprising that high exposure to peer weight-related teasing has an impact on beliefs about appearance and body shape. In this study, the frequency of reported weight-teasing

from peers was related to an individual's self-perception. Respondents answered questions about the impact of teasing from peers. The respondents with lower body image appearance evaluation tended to also have more perceptions of teasing about weight from childhood. They reported more frequent teasing and a more negative body image. Teasing may provide the most obvious negative body image development because of the nature of the teasing itself and the teasing situations. For example, teasing typically concerns only negative aspects of the body or appearance, and teasing is generally conducted in highly social situations and under circumstances considered humiliating and denigrating to the teasing recipient (Jackson, 1992). The significance of the teasing results in Hypothesis 1 is important. As reported earlier, there was a strong relationship between the variables, when it came to teasing by peers and the beliefs about appearance and body shape of an individual.

Hypothesis 2 asked if high levels of exposure to family teasing as a youth will be related to greater concerns about body shape and appearance. Results in Table 2 show how teasing by family members a youth is related to negative body image. Parents can influence body image development by commenting on their child's physical appearance, or by requiring the child to look a certain way. Although parents of young children are generally pleased with their child's appearance, many parents do comment on their children's weight (Levine & Smolak, 2004). Levine and Smolak (2004) also point out that it is common for parents to encourage their children to slim down. In addition to direct comments that parents make about their children's appearance, parental modeling of weight concerns may also contribute to body image problems that individuals develop during childhood (Thompson et al., 1995).

Hypothesis 2 was not supported, which means that there is no significance when it comes to beliefs about appearance and body shape and teasing by family members. These results may suggest a further examination of relationships between the variables to verify their connection. The fact that Hypothesis 1 was supported may be explained by the cultural standards of appearance that emphasize thinness. Because Hypothesis 2 was not supported, it can be reported that although individuals did report being teased by family members, overall, teasing by peers were more influential on a person's degree of body satisfaction. Although parental comments about children's weight did occur, body dissatisfaction was more related to peers comments about weight.

These hypotheses were connected in the findings from RQ2. Those with higher reported levels of teasing during childhood were expected to report lower levels of body satisfaction, which was shown in the results section. Furthermore, peer teasing was more strongly correlated to beliefs about appearance and body shape than parental teasing, which was demonstrated in Table 2. RQ2 asked if teasing from family members affect a person's attitudes about their appearance and their body shape more than teasing from peers. One explanation for this may be because individuals often spend much time around their peers during adolescence, whether it is at school or during other childhood activities. Because people tend to compare themselves with their peers, they may be inclined toward lower body image if they perceive they fail to compare favorably (Jones et al., 2005). When overweight or obese individuals compare themselves to their peers, they may discover that a stigma exists against the obese and overweight based on cultural ideals of beauty and slenderness, which is another possible explanation why teasing from peers influences an individual's body image more than teasing from family.

Previous literature has suggested that individual behaviors and attitudes are in significantly shaped by the people with whom we spend time (Phillips, 1986). During adolescence, individuals spend most of their time with their family and peers. Possible reasons that teasing by peers affected an individual more than teasing from family members may be attributed to mixed messages they received from teasing in general (Maine & Kelly, 2005). In other words, respondents in this sample may have been more focused on teasing that occurred at school than teasing that occurred at home. Another reason that individuals are more influenced by peer teasing than family teasing can be due to the fact that when we are teased by family members, we still feel loved by our family, but the same is not exactly true for teasing by peers. In order to determine whether or not this is true, further research would have to be conducted.

Furthermore, it may be that for this sample, the importance of appearance simply involved mixed feelings, which were possibly complicated by negative messages received from family members and peers. A possible reason for respondents being more affected from teasing by peers than family members could also be that respondents simply minimized the importance of teasing from family members. This may have been a defense mechanism or a way for them to protect themselves emotionally from the hurtful effects of the teasing from family members by telling themselves that it does not matter. Another possible reason for respondents reporting teasing by peers as being more influential to their appearance than teasing by family members may be related to the fact that this study focused on teasing during childhood. During childhood, it may be possible that individuals are simply more influenced by what other children say about their appearance, as opposed to what their family members say about their appearance. Maine

and Kelly (2005) state that “the nuclear family still plays a major role in creating our identity and guiding our development, but the culture has usurped the extended family in influence” (p. 171). This particular study clearly indicates that teasing from peers affected an individual more than teasing by family members, but further examination of teasing by family members might provide a clearer, more direct explanation.

How the process of social comparison with others is reflected in the cultural ideal of thinness helps to form a basis for this current study on the effects of teasing (Thompson, Covert, & Stormer, 1999). Social comparison appears as a factor by early adolescence in children. This is possibly one reason why individuals are teased about appearance at a young age, and why even young children are aware of whether they are overweight and why they feel bad about it. As shown throughout this research, peer influences contribute to an individual’s awareness of the negative stereotypes associated with body fat. Because of this, it was reasonable to expect that peer messages concerning body shape would affect an individual’s body image. Peer messages may take a variety of forms: comments from peers about weight and shape, discussions about body shape, and modeling of weight concerns and weight control techniques (Levine & Smolak, 2004). One possible reason that peer teasing has such a significant influence on an individual’s body image may be due to the fact that as children, we often rely on what other children have to say about us in order to gain an idea of what is considered physically attractive, which is also consistent with the idea of social comparison theory.

Those who responded to this study may have established their identity in relation to the cultural norms of thinness and their answers to the questionnaire could reflect how they perceive teasing about their appearance and/or their weight. Their responses may

indicate how their body image, beliefs about appearance, and perceptions of teasing compare with what is socially acceptable in terms of their weight. Non-overweight respondents may feel closer to the ideals of thinness in our culture and overweight respondents may feel further from the ideal and may have lower levels of body image satisfaction in relation to the level of teasing about their weight.

For RQ3, results suggest that sex plays a significant role in the ways in which both men and women perceive their body shape as evidenced by their BSQ scores, but not in their beliefs about appearances, as measured by the BAAS, when related to teasing. Recall that the BSQ asks individuals to report on their feelings about being fat, needing to diet, and thinking about their shape, whereas, the BAAS measures how much individuals think the quality of their personal and professional lives would improve if their bodies improved. Thus, this research question revealed that men thought about their body shape as much as women, but did not think that it had the same effect on their lives that women believed it did, when they are being teased about it. Therefore, when considering both the BAAS and BSQ, regardless of sex and teasing by family, teasing by peers was the strongest predictor of variance in attitudes toward the role appearance played in their lives. Although a significant model emerged, teasing by peers, not sex, was the only significant predictor in the model. As teasing by peers increased, so did concern about the role appearance played in social relationships and daily life. Men and women had the same response to teasing by peers. So although sex played a factor in body shape concerns, it did not for concerns that appearance adversely affected a person's life. In other words, both men and women reported being teased about their bodies, and it affected their beliefs about appearance.

Sex differences did not play a significant role in a person's beliefs about appearance, as demonstrated in Table 3, but it is important to point out that males and females are continuing to be affected by societal standards of physical attractiveness. Certainly, the findings for the females are compatible with previous work identifying peer teasing as a contributor to body dissatisfaction among females (Rieves & Cash, 1996) by confirming the potential negative impact of appearance teasing. This study contributes to the emerging research on the development of body image among males by highlighting the fact that weight-related teasing has a negative affect on males during adolescence. These results support the distinction in recent research between weight and muscularity as differential contributors to the development of body image in males (Pope et al., 2000; Vincent & McCabe, 2000). The contribution of this study is that it identifies weight as a negative type of appearance teasing for males and females during adolescence.

It is important to understand why sex plays a role in the BSQ score, but not the BAAS scores. This can possibly be because the BAAS measures self-perception of appearance over the course of an individual's life and the BSQ measures self-perception of appearance over the course of four weeks. Because the BAAS is an overall measurement of teasing throughout one's life and this study required respondents to reflect back to childhood memories, it is possible that the BAAS was not significant in sex differences because of memory loss. The BAAS also measures the internalization of thinness perceived by an individual. The BAAS is a measurement of an individual's thoughts on their weight and how it affects their quality of life. Both males and females may have simply forgotten how much they were teased about their physical appearance

or how significant the teasing was at that time. Since the BSQ measures self-perception of one's body image and only measure it over the course of one month, it is possible that respondents simply had more memory of being teased when it came to this particular measurement scale. In order to further understand why the BAAS was not affected by sex differences, but the BSQ was, further research would have to be conducted.

Not surprisingly, teasing is positively correlated with body dissatisfaction. This study explored teasing and its long-term effects on body image, in order to better understand whether women were more affected than men by teasing. It was shown that females took teasing more seriously than males, and these females had higher concerns about body shape. Previous literature, (Breseman, 2004, Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2004, & Ross, 1996) has focused predominately on women. Overweight and obese girls and women generally do not fit the Western ideal standard of beauty, which emphasizes thinness (Breseman, 2004). In addition, the fact that teasing affected men more than women is possibly due to the cultural objectification of the female body. More specifically, treating women as sexual objects in a way that is threatening, dehumanizing, and demeaning might cause women to focus on their bodies, encourage comparisons to the cultural ideal and to other females, and ultimately results in body dissatisfaction and greater concerns about physical appearance and body shape (Levine & Smolak, 2004).

An obese child or adolescent may be a more frequent recipient of teasing based on relative body size than their thinner peers (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2004). If the ideal standard of desirable body size in a society tends to exclude overweight and obese people, teasing may express negative thoughts about being obese and further contribute to an existing obesity stigma. Unfavorable comparisons to others who fit more closely to

the culturally ideal physical standard of thinness may further decrease body satisfaction, which is a component of body image, of those who are overweight or obese (Jones et al., 2005). People teased for being overweight or obese may compare themselves to others who are not overweight or obese and develop more problems with body image than their thinner peers, which is partly due to social comparison.

As mentioned earlier, social comparison theory states that people evaluate their own levels of attractiveness by comparing themselves to others. Not only do the targets of teasing compare themselves to other members of society, but the teasers use social comparison to determine whether or not someone should be teased. This is related to the social stigma against overweight individuals in American society (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). The scales used in this study examined the process of social comparison because individuals were asked questions pertaining to how they view themselves, as well as how they feel others view them. If the evaluation of self is close to the culturally determined ideal, body satisfaction tended to increase. The questions respondents answered that pertained to beliefs about appearance were also related to social comparison because the questions pertained were answered in terms of what American culture views as attractive, not all cultures.

Results also indicated that women were more affected by teasing than men. Given that the expectations of the culture and the notion of one's self-worth is evaluated by an attractive appearance, it is no surprise that both men and women reported being affected by teasing as a child. A possible reason for women having a stronger relationship between teasing and beliefs about appearance and body shape may be the stigma of overweight women given by society. Liechty (2004) states that "oftentimes for

women, pressure results from traditional gender stereotypes, such as the types of activities stereotypically seen as feminine and the pressure for bodily attractiveness” (p. 7). It is unpopular in American society for anyone to be overweight, but as shown throughout the literature in this thesis and the results of this study, women have more pressure to be thin than men. It is also possible that women had lower scores in body satisfaction because since there is more in the media that pressures women to be thin, women are teased more. Research has consistently established that American women are pressured to maintain a thin body (Liechty, 2004). According to the literature, there is also much pressure for males to be thin, but the pressure for men to be physically attractive has not always been as prevalent as it is now, and given the ages of the participants, that could be another possible reason women had a stronger relationship between being teased and body dissatisfaction. Most literature has found body image to be poorer among women and the effects more damaging to women than men (Richins, 1991).

The overall results from this study seem to imply that teasing based on weight-related aspects is prevalent for both males and females in our culture. Because both males and females reported being teased, which was also shown in RQ1, is consistent with the fact that social comparison plays a major role in how standards of beauty are created. Although RQ1 suggests that men and women were affected by teasing based on the BSQ scale scores, there was no sex difference in the BAAS scale scores. Once again, this could possibly be due to the fact that these two scales measure different things. It is hard to determine exactly why there was no sex difference in the BAAS scale score, but it is possibly due to the fact that the BAAS does not measure body image. The BAAS only

measures how an individual feels their appearance affects his or her life. There are obvious sex differences when it comes to teasing and body image, but both sexes have an outstanding amount of pressure by society to be thin. The data shown in Table 1 is consistent in supporting a relationship between peer teasing and body dissatisfaction. This was truer of females than males. This is possibly because females may be more exposed to, aware of, or sensitive to weight-related messages from family members and peers. Sensitivity to the message may be an important reason why females had a stronger relationship between teasing and body dissatisfaction.

Strengths in Research.

Because of previous research and the proposed questions in this thesis, certain outcomes were expected from this project. It was expected that individuals who were teased as children are more likely to have a negative body image as they become adults. As research has previously found, those who are teased as children have body image issues (Thompson et al., 1995). As stated earlier, Benas and Gibb (2006) found that being teased about weight related topics increases the chances of an individual suffering from depression or other dysfunctional cognitions. Benas and Gibb (2006) also discovered that individuals who suffered from weight-related teasing as children often have higher levels of body dissatisfaction. This is important because people may not realize exactly how much of an effect teasing has on an individual. As mentioned earlier, residual effects of teasing may continue to impact and influence perceptions of body and self of the childhood teasing recipients well into adulthood (Breseman, 2004).

As stated by Keltner et al. (2001), as well as Mills and Babrow (2003), teasing can be either harmful or playful, and in fact, can be both simultaneously. Keltner et al.

(2001) point out that teasing is often “an intentional provocation accompanied by playful markers that together comment on something of relevance to the target of tease” (p. 229). Furthermore, Mills and Babrow (2003) state that teasing can be functional, noting that some cultures use teasing as a form of social control, even using it “to keep children from performing socially unacceptable or undesirable behaviors” (p. 275). Although this literature illustrates how teasing can be playful and functional, this study demonstrates that teasing can also be dysfunctional, and that harm can come of teasing, particularly in the realm of weight-related teasing. Weight-related teasing is often done in terms of upward social comparison. As mentioned earlier, upward social comparison occurs when an individual compares himself or herself to someone who is considered being more physically attractive (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). This is harmful because, as noted by Mills and Carwile (2009), teasing about weight is seen as taboo topic, one in which the participants have little immediate control, and one in which is unlikely to ever been taken in spirit of play or amusement. Teasing, in this sense, is ultimately cruel and akin to insulting or putting-down the target.

The study of the college population is important because as research has discovered, younger populations of females are more likely to be dissatisfied with their body than older female populations (Liechty, 2004). According to Kalodner and Scarano (1992) 85% of college females believe that they are either slightly or seriously overweight. Given that students are known to have body image issues, this study sheds light on some of the factors that contribute to their body image issues through the mechanisms of social comparison and teasing.

The current results provide additional support for the hypothesis and research questions discussed throughout this project. These results are also consistent with previous findings, which indicate that teasing from family members and peers has a negative effect on an individual. A major strength of this study is its large sample size, as well as the inclusion of multiple measurement scales used to determine the specific effects of teasing on an individual. As shown in Table 1, there is a statistically significant and a strong, positive relationship between the BSQ and BAAS, which is important in this particular research. The fact that sex differences are significant in the BSQ and BAAS measurements was also an important finding in this study, which is illustrated by Table 2. Table 3 illustrates that the BSQ of an individual is affected more by peers and the BAAS is affected more by family members.

Limitations.

A major limitation of this study was that all of the measures were based upon participants' self-report, which required individuals to reflect on childhood experiences. The reason this is a possible limitation is because self-reporting is not always accurate and potential memory loss may alter how well participants were able to self-report their childhood experiences. Another limitation of this study is that individuals who are currently depressed may remember more instances of teasing than those who are not currently suffering from depression. Memories fade or become distorted overtime; this research assumes that respondents will remember incidents of teasing accurately. Issues of recollection of memories of childhood and adolescent incidences of teasing are more difficult to assess; therefore, subjective memory was a potential limitation. The fact that this research did not use BMI is another possible limitation. BMI is a measurement of

the body mass index of an individual. It is calculated by using an individual's weight and height. Because BMI measurements determine whether or not an individual is considered overweight, it is likely that BMI levels could account for the teasing that occurred among participants during their childhood. The weight of the respondents was what accounted for all findings in this study, not the BMI of the respondents. Another limitation of this study was the predominately Caucasian sample. As mentioned earlier, Caucasians made up the majority of the population of this sample and it would be interesting to continue this study with larger percentages of other ethnicities.

However, because there was a large response rate it may be indicative of a larger population effect and might be replicated. There is also the possibility of a sample bias. Because respondents knew the topic before they opened the survey, it is possible that targets of teasing may have been more highly motivated to respond to the survey than those who simply had not been targets of teasing in childhood. If an individual was not teased as child, there is the possibility he or she simply did not feel motivated to participate in the survey. Another limitation of the study concerned the possible sensitive nature of the topic. With this being said, the current results are consistent with the previous findings that indicate that teasing during childhood often produces negative body image in adults. Future studies would be useful to further determine how teasing affects individuals. The focus on university undergraduates may limit the generalizability of these findings.

Future Research.

There are many reasons why the present research is important. Guided by social comparison theory, the present research wants to aid in understanding how individuals

are affected by teasing and how this teasing could lead to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits. Social comparison will lead to a better understanding of this topic because people tease others about weight-related issues based on current societal standards of beauty. As previously noted, the survey used in the research will consist of questions that are weight-related. The questions will also ask whether or not the individual was teased as a child and how this affects the person's current view of his or her own body.

Because people have a different idea of what is beautiful, social comparison differs among individuals. For example, if the culture values attractiveness in its members, then individuals will value attractiveness in themselves and others. In the same regard, if the culture does not place so much value on the importance of attractiveness, then individuals are more likely to consider it unimportant to judge themselves and others in terms of physical attractiveness. Just because Western society views thinness as being attractive does not necessarily mean that other cultures view thinness as attractive. This leads to the idea that beauty is a socially constructed concept that differs among societies and what is considered attractive is often determined by the media.

Furthermore, although peers were found as having the biggest influence on an individual's body image, it would be interesting to study how individuals are affected by different family members. It has also been shown that women are more influenced by what their mothers have to say about their weight than by what their fathers have to say, which would be a topic that could be further researched for this study. Because this research used quantitative measures to determine results, it would also be interesting to replicate the study using qualitative measures. Another implication for future research

for this topic would be to examine the cultural differences among individuals who are teased as a child by their family members and peers through the use of social comparison theory.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to explore the extent to which individuals perceived they were teased about their weight by family members and peers, and its association with body image dissatisfaction in a college population. The research used social comparison theory as a guide in determining how teasing from family members and teasing from affects on individual's self-perception. The goal of using social comparison theory was to gain a better understanding of how those doing the teasing, as well as those being teased, are affected by societal standards of beauty and how weight-related teasing affects people. As the current research suggests, teasing has a significant negative impact on the body image of both males and females. This research is important because of the amount of overweight people in the American society and because as research suggests, weight-related teasing is extremely prevalent in American society. The results suggested several implications for future research. One important implication would be to extend this research to different cultures. Lastly, the current research suggests that teasing from family members, as well as peers, affects an individual and it varies depending on sex and which scale is used.

The present finding of a significant relationship between body image dissatisfaction and teasing in this study is supportive of previous work. Depending on which scale was used, peers had more of an impact than family members. For example,

when the BSQ was used to measure teasing and body image by family and peers, peers had more of a negative impact on individuals than family members. The results of this study also suggested that males and females were affected differently, depending on what measure was used. For example, when the BSQ was used males were more affected by peer teasing, but both sexes were affected the same when the BAAS was used. Because of these interesting findings, it is important to continue the study of teasing and body image and how it affects individuals differently. This study provides an understanding of the experience of negative teasing in relation to one's weight. The outcomes of this study create a foundation for future studies that further examine the impact of negative teasing on both males and females.

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Appendix A: Beliefs About Appearance Body Scale*

For each item, decide if you agree (A), strongly agree (SA), are neutral (N), strongly disagree (SD), or disagree (D) with the statement. Choose the letter that corresponds to your rating below.

1. The opinion others have of me is based on my appearance	SA	A	N	D	SD
2. The amount of influence I have on other people depends upon how I look	SA	A	N	D	SD
3. People would be more interested in me if I looked better	SA	A	N	D	SD
4. My relationships would improve if I looked the way I wished	SA	A	N	D	SD
5. The amount of success I have in my future job or career depends largely upon how I look	SA	A	N	D	SD
6. People will think less of me if I don't look my best	SA	A	N	D	SD
7. My appearance influences my ability to do things	SA	A	N	D	SD
8. My performance in activities (e.g. school, work, hobbies) is influenced by how I look	SA	A	N	D	SD
9. The opportunities that are available to me					

depend upon how I look	SA	A	N	D	SD
10. My school and work performance or opportunities would improve if I looked the way I wished	SA	A	N	D	SD
11. My value as a person depends upon how I look	SA	A	N	D	SD
12. How I feel about myself is largely based on my appearance	SA	A	N	D	SD
13. I would think more highly of myself if I looked the way I wished	SA	A	N	D	SD
14. How I look is a large part of who I am	SA	A	N	D	SD
15. It is difficult to feel good about myself when I am not looking my best	SA	A	N	D	SD
16. My ability to feel happy depends upon how I look	SA	A	N	D	SD
17. Improving my appearance is one of the few activities that makes me feel good or like I am accomplishing something	SA	A	N	D	SD
18. My life will be more exciting or rewarding if I look good	SA	A	N	D	SD
19. My moods are influenced by how I look	SA	A	N	D	SD
20. I would enjoy life more if I looked the way I wished	SA	A	N	D	SD

* Reproduced from an unpublished dissertation by Toni Liechty of Brigham Young
Univeristy

Appendix B: Body Shape Questionnaire*

For each item, decide if you agree (A), strongly agree (SA), are neutral (N), strongly disagree (SD), or disagree (D) with the statement. Choose the letter that corresponds to your rating below.

1. Feeling bored has made you feel broad about your
shape SA A N D SD
2. You have been so worried about your shape that
you feel you ought to diet SA A N D SD
3. You think that your hips or bottom or too large
for the rest of you SA A N D SD
4. You are afraid that you might become fat
or fatter SA A N D SD
5. You are worried about your flesh being not
firm enough SA A N D SD
6. When you are full (e.g. after eating a large meal)
you feel fat SA A N D SD
7. You feel so bad about your shape that you cry SA A N D SD
8. You avoid running because your flesh might
wobble SA A N D SD
9. Being with thin women makes you feel self-
conscious about your shape SA A N D SD

10. You worry about your thighs spreading out when you sit down	SA	A	N	D	SD
11. Eating even small amounts of food makes you feel fat	SA	A	N	D	SD
12. When you notice the shape of other women you feel that your own shape compares unfavorably	SA	A	N	D	SD
13. Thinking about your shape interferes with your ability to concentrate	SA	A	N	D	SD
14. Being naked, such as when taking a bath, makes you feel fat	SA	A	N	D	SD
15. You avoid wearing clothes which make you particularly aware of the shape of your body	SA	A	N	D	SD
16. You imagine cutting off fleshy areas of your body	SA	A	N	D	SD
17. Eating sweets, cakes, or other high calorie food makes you feel fat	SA	A	N	D	SD
18. You sometimes do not go out to social events (e.g. parties) because you feel fat	SA	A	N	D	SD
19. You feel excessively large and rounded	SA	A	N	D	SD
20. You feel ashamed of your body	SA	A	N	D	SD
21. Worrying about your shape makes you diet	SA	A	N	D	SD
22. You feel happiest about your shape when					

your stomach is empty (e.g. in the morning)	SA	A	N	D	SD
23. You think you are in the shape you are because you lack self-control	SA	A	N	D	SD
24. You worry about other people seeing rolls of fat around your stomach	SA	A	N	D	SD
25. You feel that is it unfair that other women are thinner than you	SA	A	N	D	SD
26. You vomit in order to feel thinner	SA	A	N	D	SD
27. When in company you worry about taking up too much room (e.g. on the sofa or bus)	SA	A	N	D	SD
28. You worry about your flesh being dimply	SA	A	N	D	SD
29. Seeing your reflection (e.g. in a mirror shop window) makes you feel bad about your shape	SA	A	N	D	SD
30. You pinch areas of your body to see how much fat there is	SA	A	N	D	SD
31. You avoid situations where people could see your body (e.g. changing rooms or swimming)	SA	A	N	D	SD
32. You take laxatives to feel thinner	SA	A	N	D	SD
33. You are particularly self-conscious when in the company of others	SA	A	N	D	SD
34. Worrying about your shape makes you feel you ought to exercise	SA	A	N	D	SD

* Reproduced from the Body Shape Questionnaire that was first reported in Cooper, P.J., M.J. Taylor, Z. Cooper & C.G. Fairburn (1986). The development and validation of the Body Shape Questionnaire. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 6: 485-494.

Appendix C: Perceptions of Teasing Scale*

For each item, decide if you agree (A), strongly agree (SA), are neutral (N), strongly disagree (SD), or disagree (D) with the statement. Choose the letter that corresponds to your rating below.

When responding to the following items, remember teasing experiences back to your experiences with your peers.

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|-------|
| 1. People made fun of you when you were in high school | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 2. People made jokes about you being too heavy | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 3. People laughed at you for trying out for sports because you were too heavy | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 4. People called you names like “fatso” | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 5. People pointed at you because you were overweight | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 6. People snickered about your heaviness when you walked into a room alone | SA | A | N | D | SD 7. |
| People made fun of you by repeating something that you said because they thought it was dumb | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 8. People made fun of you because you were afraid to do something | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 9. People said you acted dumb | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 10. People laughed at you because you didn’t | | | | | |

understand something SA A N D SD

11. People teased you because you didn't get a

joke SA A N D SD

*Reproduced from an unpublished dissertation by Joshua Bias of Texas A&M
University.

Appendix D: Perceptions of Teasing Scale*

For each item, decide if you agree (A), strongly agree (SA), are neutral (N), strongly disagree (SD), or disagree (D) with the statement. Choose the letter that corresponds to your rating below.

When responding to the following items, remember teasing experiences back to your experiences with close family members.

- | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|---|-------|
| 1. Family members made fun of you when you were in high school | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 2. Family members made jokes about you being too heavy | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 3. Family members laughed at you for trying out for sports because you were too heavy | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 4. Family members called you names like “fatso” | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 5. Family members pointed at you because you were overweight | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 6. Family members snickered about your heaviness when you walked into a room alone | SA | A | N | D | SD 7. |
| 7. Family members made fun of you by repeating something that you said because they thought it was dumb | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 8. Family members made fun of you because you were afraid to do something | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 9. Family members said you acted dumb | SA | A | N | D | SD |

10. Family members laughed at you because you didn't understand something SA A N D SD
11. Family members teased you because you didn't get a joke SA A N D SD

*Reproduced from an unpublished dissertation by Joshua Bias of Texas A&M University.

Appendix E: Demographics

1. Age: _____

2. Height: _____

3. Weight: _____

4. Sex:

a.) Male

b.) Female

5. Ethnic Group (please select the one you most closely identify with):

1. African American

2. Asian American

3. Caucasian

4. Hispanic

5. Native American

6. Other (please indicate): _____