Is it Really Skin Deep? An Analysis of *Ugly Betty*'s Influence on Females'

Understanding of Beauty

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ABSTRACT

The current study explores the influence nontraditional framing of beauty and ugliness has on college aged females' interpretation of beauty. Focus group sessions were used to assess this influence, during which the women were asked several questions within two open discussions of beauty. The television sitcom Ugly Betty, which features an alternative framing of beauty standards, was shown between each discussion and used to analyze the media's influence. The results show that the discussion and the new framing of beauty and ugliness in the clip influenced the women's interpretations by either creating new understandings or re-enforcing existing beliefs. The women also considered media images of beauty to have a third-person effect with younger audiences being more impacted. Social comparison was used slightly in explaining beauty definitions and standards for women.

Dedications

To my mother, father, sisters, and boyfriend you all are incredible and I thank God everyday for allowing me to have you in my lives. I know that each of you is proud of me and I thank you for reminding me of that, especially when you know I needed to hear it. I dedicate this to you simply because you all are my heart.

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Rationale

Beauty standards, their prevalence in the media, and their effects on society have been a subject of growing interest in the research field (e.g., Aubrey, 2007; Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert, 2007; Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008; Krcmar, Giles, & Helme, 2008; Park, 2005; Rivero, 2003). Although it is quite an ambiguous term, beauty is a concept that is fairly agreed upon throughout society. Multi-dimensional and constantly changing beauty standards are created and embedded within society with the help of the media (Berry, 2007; English, Solomon, & Ashmore, 1994; Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008). Women face stricter beauty standards that are difficult to achieve, despite their continuous efforts, as female media images are more often one-dimensional and idealistic (Hendriks, 2002).

The media help to communicate beauty standards through the images presented to society (Berry, 2007; English, 1994; Goodman, Morris, Sutherland, 2008; Hendriks, 2002; Jackson, 1992). Research shows that models, actors, actresses, and other individuals in the media spotlight traditionally possess the same characteristics—tall, slim, radiant skin, youthful, etc. The media beauty standards are especially influential for women. These repeating images create beauty ideals which women often feel they must achieve (Hendriks, 2002). With the pressure to become beautiful, women undergo processes ranging from something as minimal as applying cosmetics to something riskier to their health such as undergoing plastic surgery. These beauty rituals and the importance tied with them can have physical and psychological effects on females directly or indirectly such as anorexia nervosa or low self-esteem (English, 1994; Jeffreys, 2005; Krcmar, Giles, & Helme, 2008).

In 2006, a new television show emerged presenting a different style of characters. *Ugly Betty*, the American version of the Spanish telenovela *Yo soy Betty la fea*, is a television sitcom aired on ABC that features a main character who conflicts with the traditional beauty standards. Leading lady, Betty Suarez, is a short, voluptuous, Latina with frizzy hair, red eye glasses, blue braces, and a weak fashion sense. As a personal assistant for an editor at a fashion magazine she is often surrounded by fellow employees and models who meet the traditional beauty requirements. Clearly, this television sitcom brings images of both "beauty" and "ugly" to the forefront. These new images have the potential to downplay existing beauty standards, create new beauty standards, or even serve as reinforcement for existing beauty standards.

Several media effects studies have provided evidence of the negative relationship between idealized media images (transferred into beauty standards) and women's perception of their own self image. Findings support the argument that beauty images can have both a psychological and physical effect on the female audience (Aubrey, 2007; Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert, 2007; Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008; Krcmar, Giles, & Helme, 2008; Park, 2005; Rivero, 2003; Tan, 1979). However, not as many studies take a qualitative approach in order to study the possible influence of beauty images. Media can have a direct effect and/or an influence on audiences which can be examined through the use of several theories. The current study takes a closer look at the possible influence of mediated beauty images on female audiences through the use of framing theory. Framing is the process of creating a narrative for audience member's by highlighting certain information thereby guiding the interpretation of the information (Entman, 2007).

Although framing theory traditionally has been used to explore media effects within news coverage and other discussions of topics such as crises, international issues, controversies,

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and politics (e.g., Bichard, 2006; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007; De Vreese, 2004; De Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001; Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, & Trammell, 2005; Entman, 1991; Gamson, 1989; Iyengar, 1991; Kuypers, 2001; Moldoff & Williams, 2007; Porto, 2007; Semetko, Boomgaarden, De Vreese, 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Williams, 2007; Williams & Kaid, 2006), it can also be used to understand the way beauty is presented by the media for women and how it assists them in interpreting and understanding beauty. The media frames beauty, or rather, packages information strategically thereby providing viewers with a lens to view images through (in the case of this study these are images of beauty and ugliness).

The third-person effect hypothesis and social comparison theory also can help explain the relationship between media's portrayal of beauty and women's perceptions. Applying third-person effect (Davison, 1983) to this topic, a female viewer may believe that media images are more likely to have a strong effect on others, rather than on oneself. This allows for an indirect media effect, since beauty images would be accepted by "the other" thereby still enforcing beauty standards for all (Park, 2005). The current study uses this hypothesis to look for a possible third-person effect or influence. Although scholarly work dealing with third-person effects has been exclusively the domain of quantitative research, this study in part aims to see if women in their open discussions of beauty will talk about the media's influence of beauty on women in terms of third-person effects. In terms of Leon Festinger's social comparison theory (Suls & Wheeler, 2000), women compare their opinions on beauty and ability to be beautiful to others. These comparisons could be made with women in their day to day life, but also can include women in the media who represent the ideal beauty.

While there are several studies that help to illustrate the effect of traditional, idealized and somewhat unrealistic beauty images in the media (predominately magazines and advertising) on women, very little (e.g., Rivero, 2003) research has been done on television sitcoms and the influence of "ugly" images. This may be partly due to the fact that sitcoms are expected to solely provide comedic relief and "ugly" images have never been in the forefront of the media. However, with the emergence of *Ugly Betty* and its new style of communicating information on beauty, it is time again to extend the research on beauty. Perhaps these images in *Ugly Betty* only serve as a new way of framing beauty, thereby reinforcing current beauty standards and continuing the negative effects of these images. There is also the possibility that the sitcom encourages the emergence of new beauty themes and standards, better or worse than those that currently exist for the women.

While other methods such as surveys can be used to study media effects on a larger amount of participants, having face-to-face discussion with a participant allows for certain themes to emerge helping to show connections between outside factors and influences on women's identity (e.g., Buzzanell, Waymer, Tagle, & Liu, 2007). Focus groups, a qualitative research method that is often used to promote insightful discussions about issues and topics, were constructed of female undergraduates (ages 18 and up) in order to investigate this issue. By both promoting discussion about beauty, thereby assessing the females' perceptions and interpretations of society's and media's framing of beauty, and presenting a brief media clip of the television sitcom *Ugly Betty*, this approach helps in discovering whether this different presentation of beauty/ugly offers women a different way of viewing and discussing beauty.

Introduction

It is becoming more apparent as the years progress that mass media can have an influence on its audiences. News programming is no longer the only purveyor of information that impacts societal relationships, expectations, senses of identity, and construction of reality. Entertainment media, such as television situation comedies (commonly referred to as TV sitcoms), can go beyond providing comedic relief for their audiences. Within these plots and storylines messages are embedded that can create and/or reinforce ideologies, or widely accepted beliefs. These ideologies are then used by society in making decisions and shaping opinions. As with many other facets of life, a person's identity will affect the way in which he or she interprets and is affected by these messages. For female audiences, one ideology often created and enforced by media messages that has a large effect on their lifestyles and identities is the concept of beauty. Past research studies have illustrated how the media has been a key player in setting the standard for what women must look like in order to be considered "beautiful" by society (e.g., Berry, 2007; English, Solomon, & Ashmore, 1994; Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008; Hendriks, 2002; Jackson, 1992). Television is one example of a medium that has broad impact due to its vast reach, viewership, and reliance on mediated images.

One way in which television can create and reinforce these beauty standards is through framing beauty, which is directly correlated with having the perfect physical appearance, as being an important part of society. The majority of television sitcoms feature a cast in which the female characters all exhibit the traditional attributes that are supposed to equate to beauty, for example: thin with smooth skin, long beautiful hair, and a youthful look (Berry, 2007). However, in recent years, a new television sitcom has emerged that differs in terms of the leading

characters and the images presented. This show, *Ugly Betty*, is aired on ABC and features a leading lady who completely conflicts with the ideal beauty image.

At first glance, this television portrayal seems to serve in opposition to the beauty standards that have been set so incredibly high for women. While this portrayal conflicts with the majority of beauty images presented on television sitcoms, the fact remains that the leading lady, although a warmhearted and hardworking individual, is still labeled as being "ugly." This new style of portraying beauty could have a number of influences on female audience members. Perhaps it could reinforce current beauty standards, create new and more realistic standards, begin to expose the flaws in current beauty standards, or create a conversation between audience members about the importance (or lack thereof) of beauty in society. Since the concept of beauty has become such an important idea in society and can have such a negative influence, it is important to see how women respond to and make sense of the new re-packaging of beauty in *Ugly Betty*. The following study takes a closer look into the notion of beauty by using *Ugly Betty* as a launching pad to discuss what beauty is, what ugly is, and what role the media can play in the framing and discussion of beauty.

Most researchers have contributed to the field of framing research by focusing on news coverage and discussion of politics, controversies, international issues, and crises (e.g., Bichard, 2006; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007; De Vreese, 2004; De Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001; Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, & Trammell, 2005; Entman, 1991; Gamson, 1989; Iyengar, 1991; Kuypers, 2001; Moldoff & Williams, 2007; Porto, 2007; Semetko, Boomgaarden, De Vreese, 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Williams, 2007; Williams & Kaid, 2006), but this study will use framing to further investigate beauty standards. Through promoting discussion among these young women about the importance and definition

of beauty before and after exposure to a small clip of *Ugly Betty*, their interpretations and perceptions of beauty can be assessed. The findings from this study will also add to the field of framing research and to the study of beauty and physical attractiveness.

Introducing "Ugly Betty"

     Ugly Betty is the American re-creation of the Spanish telenovela, *Yo soy Betty la fea*, which is loosely translated as, "I am ugly Betty"; Salma Hayek is the executive producer of the American version of the sitcom, which has won Golden Globe, Peabody, NAACP, ALMA and Imagen Awards. The sitcom has been nominated for 11 Emmy awards which is a new record for a comedy series (About *Ugly Betty,* n.d.). Several websites only provide a short synopsis of the show, or information about the current season. The leading lady of the American version is Betty Suarez (played by actress America Ferrera), a short Latina with frizzy hair, red eye glasses, blue braces, and a curvaceous shape. She does not possess the ideal body weight and is often teased by her co-workers for not being beautiful or attractive. The show is set in New York where Betty lived in the first season with her father, sister (who does meet the thin requirement), and nephew. She works as the assistant to Daniel Meade, editor of the fashion magazine *Mode*. Surrounded by models and other employees who do meet the beauty standards, Betty stands out as being one of the few unattractive people of the bunch. She is often featured in flannel, polyester, and other styles of clothes that don't match in terms of the colors and patterns. In other words, Betty is an "ordinary girl…who is a bit fashion-challenged" (About *Ugly Betty*, n.d.).

     Although Betty does not possess attractive facial and body characteristics, she is a hardworking, ambitious, family oriented individual with a kind heart and warm personality (About *Ugly Betty,* n.d.). She is often trying to teach people the true meaning of life and the importance of family and friendship. When put in moral dilemmas, she often chooses the "right"

way which is not always the desirable choice. Her hard work is only acknowledged by her boss (who often gets credit for her success), her family, and her close friend and employee of the same company (who also does not meet the traditional standards of beauty, although not as extreme as Betty).

Since Betty is labeled as "ugly" it is obvious that the physical qualities she possesses equates to ugliness. It is a safe assumption for viewers to consider red eye glasses, blue braces, frizzy hair, a curvy shape, and loose fitting unfashionable clothing as being the components of an ugly woman. The fact that Betty is often picked on for being unattractive by employees of the magazine who are complete opposites of her—thin, perfect eyes with correct vision, perfect teeth with no braces, fashionable and tight fitting clothes, and straight hair—also points out the physical characteristics that constitute beauty. *Ugly Betty* was chosen for this analysis because it differs in several ways from other television sitcoms that communicate the ideas of beauty. The biggest difference is that this show's leading lady is actually a woman that does not possess attractive characteristics. This show also defines ugly, while other shows usually only directly define beauty, whereas, ugliness is implied as being opposite of the beautiful images. Another big difference is that *Ugly Betty* features an ugly female who is happy, successful, and kindhearted. In many shows, success and happiness is attributed to those who are seen as attractive. Compared to the majority of images in the media, beauty and ugliness are framed differently by *Ugly Betty*.

While the motives for creating such a show are unclear, there are multiple interpretations that could arise from this show. This show could exist to serve as a parody of the fashion industry, which is often credited as being a key communicator of beauty requirements. Some may argue that this show exists to illustrate how women who are not necessarily attractive can

still find happiness and be successful. A different assumption, which sparked the initial interest

in this study, is that this show could be responsible for re-framing the idea of beauty by showing

females what they shouldn't look like. While *Ugly Betty* presents some positive characteristics of

unattractive women, the fact remains that Betty is still being labeled as "ugly." The question is:

do these images of the "ugly" yet intelligent and kindhearted young woman positively or

negatively shape the way in which young females talk about and make sense of beauty. Past

research has shown that television does have effects on its audiences and that beauty standards

can serve an oppressive nature for young women. Cohen and Ribak (2003) argue in some of their

research, that audiences (including females) of popular culture enjoy viewing shows that are

realistic and cause pleasure. This, of course, is another consideration when exploring the

possible influence of these media messages. Perhaps these new portrayals present a more

realistic experience for women. Yet before proceeding to explore if this new media portrayal—as

featured in *Ugly Betty*—present more realistic expectations of beauty for women, it is first

important to have a clear understanding of the existing definitions of beauty, its corresponding

standards, and its role in the media.

Review of Literature

What is Beauty?

Beauty is a multi-dimensional, subjective concept created and sometimes agreed upon by

society. Oftentimes, it can be referred to as physical attractiveness. It is an idea that is embedded

within different cultures and changes over time and throughout generations in order to include

several different ethnic and age groups. Women make special efforts to obtain the ideal beauty

that is acceptable by their culture at any given time (Berry, 2007; Goodman, Morris, &

Sutherland, 2008; English, Solomon, & Ashmore, 1994). Regardless of its ever changing

definition and variance across cultures, beauty is still generally agreed upon by society. Although it cannot always be defined by individuals, it is recognizable by many (Berry, 2007). According to Wolf (1991), the idea of beauty, which exists in society, serves as a way to oppress even the most powerful and independent. What she refers to as the "beauty myth" is the expectations women are required to meet in order to be beautiful, desirable, and welcomed by society. These standards are the result of "a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement" (Wolf, 1991, p. 10).

Some scholars assert that the standards of beauty are a form of social control over women that emerged after the impact of feminism which combated several other oppressive elements of society. Jeffreys (2005) agreed arguing that, many feminist writers and researches believe that the idea of beauty is a damaging and oppressive constraint on women. They often argue that these beauty standards cause psychological damage. The beauty practices women endure on all parts of their body in order to achieve beauty also have harmful effects on females' lives. Such beauty rituals and activities include, but are not limited to, "clothing, cosmetics, hairstyling, tanning salons, leisure activities (e.g., aerobics, tennis, or weight lifting) and even plastic surgery (e.g., breast or lip implants or liposuction)" (English et al., 1994, p.50). In this sense, beauty is not a normal human or innate trait, but rather, it is presented as a commodity that can, and must be obtained by women in order to fit with the ideal through purchasing products and participating in the various beauty practices (Berry 2007; Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert, 2007). Fulfilling the beauty requirements gives women a sense of fitting in and signals status and success. These beauty rituals also lead to the homogenization of beauty, or rather, creating the same standard and definition for many women to follow (Berry, 2007).

Unfortunately, due to the fact that beauty standards are set so high and continuously change, women rarely ever fully meet these standards. Yet they continue to try to meet these standards through their practice of different rituals (Gimlin, 2001). Furthermore, such high beauty standards sexually objectify unwilling women, thereby serving as the form of oppression and unfair treatment that it is (Jeffreys, 2005). This ideal beauty continues to exist as it "[grows] stronger to take over the work of social coercion that myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity, no longer can manage" (Wolf, 1991, p. 11). The beauty myth has existed throughout several different centuries, each presenting a different ideal of beauty in which women should strive for in order to be desirable. However, regardless of how the beauty myth is defined or communicated during a given time period, it has a detrimental effect on women physically and psychologically (Wolf, 1991).

Jackson (1992) provided a compilation of findings from several different researchers who conducted studies on the ideal physical appearance for women. According to the researchers, facial attractiveness is not discussed or studied as much as bodily attractiveness because it is more obvious and universal. The two characteristics normally associated with facial beauty are, "characteristics that indicate good health—for example, clear complexion, cleanliness, clear eyes, and luxuriant hair—and characteristics that indicate youth" (p. 60). The cross-cultural agreement on what constitutes facial attractiveness could be attributed to the "advanced communications technology which permits and encourages shared standards of attractiveness" (p. 61). Television can serve as an example of such a communication technology that promotes this shared concept of facial attractiveness which lends itself to ideal beauty.

In terms of body characteristics, some of the studies' findings mentioned by Jackson (1992) showed that an overly curvaceous body is less desirable and a narrow waist and hips are

linked more with attractiveness. Weight, and its appropriate distribution, is considered to be an important determining factor of physical attractiveness. Thinness is often associated with self-control and personal accomplishment. However, the standard that thinness is an attribute of the ideal body is one of the reasons why the amount of women unhappy with their bodies continues to increase over time (Berry, 2007). Furthermore, the obese body type, and a person possessing it, 'is perceived as being less intelligent, least likely to be popular or befriended, frequent victims of social rejection, and unhappy' (Jackson, 1992, p. 166). One scholar argues that the thin ideal still exists but the larger body style has become more accepted with the change (Berry, 2007).

Facial attractiveness and body attractiveness are two characteristics of females that are believed to make up the ideal beauty. This is where it is clearer to see how beauty is normally equated with physical attractiveness—it is made up of facial and body attractiveness; it is strictly physical because it does not include anything other than a person's exterior features. Lifestyles and emotions are associated with attractiveness, making it a more desirable trait for women to try to obtain. A woman who possesses the characteristics necessary to make her more attractive is seen as being more 'likable, sociable, independent, and exciting' than that of the more 'deviant and stigmatized' unattractive woman (English et al., 1994, p.50). Attributions such as these support Berry's (2007) argument that "…the social values placed on appearance are meaningful in their consequences" rather than in the appearance itself (p. 5). Jackson (1992) argued the same point as her research provides evidence that body ideals are defined and followed by females because of the consequences and negative repercussions that result from not meeting these standards.

Berry (2007) furthered this point with her discussion of the way in which beauty plays an important role in terms of health, romance, and the workplace. She argued that since we judge

health in part according to some physical traits—"plentiful hair, unmarred skin, strong teeth, good musculature…"—beauty is thereby an indicator of health. Since people judge healthy people to be fertile, she also argued that beautiful people are chosen more often as ideal breeding partners. According to her work, beauty carries positive ramifications for romance, as physical appearance is one of the top considerations in choosing a mate. Youthful traits and lighter skin color (in several different races) are two more favorable characteristics when selecting romantic partners. Height and weight are two attractiveness measuring traits that have begun to change over time and with cultures. While the original ideal was short and thin, the emergence of organizations such as National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) and the growing popularity of models and tall actresses, tall and larger body styles are becoming more accepted. However, thin is still the general ideal. Attractive people are generally known to have better luck with dating and marriage as they are a more favorable pick by their romantic counterparts. Attractive women also have a higher likelihood of finding a wealthy mate than unattractive women.

Beauty can also be a determining factor in the workplace. This is due largely to the fact that positive traits are attributed to the physically attractive—"more intelligent, easier-to-be-around, more mentally healthy, and more socially skilled…"—which define them as a better employee (Berry, 2007, p. 40). Size is a large discriminatory factor as thin individuals are more likely to be hired and compensated more than overweight individuals (Berry, 2007). Meanings and consequences attached to beauty, such as these, combined with the increased popularity of beauty practices ranging in severity, and the impact of oppressive beauty standards on women's self-esteem, it is a combination of the requirements for physical and facial attractiveness (which equals beauty) that causes such a harmful effect on female audiences.

The television sitcom, *Ugly Betty,* makes a clearer distinction between what is pretty and ugly, in terms of facial and physical appearance. Being that the leading lady is labeled as "ugly" helps female audiences see what facial and body attributes are undesirable. This is a prime example of why this show was a good subject for this analysis. The current study adds to this literature on beauty standards by illustrating whether this definition of beauty and its accompanying standards and definitions of attractiveness still exist and if they are mentioned as important factors by young women when discussing beauty. By using focus groups and asking a series of questions in order to promote discussion about beauty before viewing the media clip, the role of beauty in these young women's lives and the meaning attached to it was assessed. It was important to see what the participants think about beauty before they view *Ugly Betty* and engage in subsequent discussion. While the images in that particular television sitcom have not been explored, several studies have been conducted on the more traditional images in the media.

Beauty in the Media

English, Solomon, and Ashmore (1994) theorized that since Banner argued in 1983 that the definition of beauty is created in part during the socialization process, then beauty must be defined at some point in the process by "mass media vehicles of popular culture" (p. 51). As socializing agents, the mass media "emphasize[s] beauty as the route to social acceptability (Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008, p. 148). Researchers also argue that media gatekeepers serve as creators of beauty ideals by presenting images of beauty and attractiveness for audiences and creating icons of beauty through their casting of actors and actresses that possess these beauty qualities (English et al., 1994). When the media presents a limited range of physical and facial attractiveness among these leading characters, stricter beauty standards are created and communicated.

Not only does this lack of variety in media images create unrealistic beauty ideas for all of society, Hendriks (2002) argued that the media representations of women are much more one dimensional and idealistic than those of males. One common trend among women in the media is that actresses with substantial roles are thin (Jackson, 1992). These leading ladies are also 'young, beautiful, and glamorized' (Hendricks, 2002). The media is responsible for helping to reinforce the beauty standards and stereotypes by primarily casting these thin, attractive characters and failing to cast unattractive, heavy or disabled individuals in a more positive light (Berry, 2007). Several studies have been conducted exploring the prevalence of beauty in different media, many of which investigate its effects on audience members.

The impact of beauty images in the media is not a new research interest and dates back several years. For example, Tan (1979) explored physical attractiveness in advertisements and its impact on female audience members. She explored beauty commercials which she operationalized as meaning, "those which used as selling points the desirability of sex appeal, youth, or beauty and/or those in which the sex appeal (physical attractiveness) of commercial actors or actresses was a selling point" (p. 284). Tan showed a series of commercials for random products to groups of young women—one set of commercials featuring the different beauty traits (beauty commercials) and one set not featuring these beauty traits (neutral commercials). Her findings showed that those participants exposed to the beauty commercials ranked beauty as being higher in importance for themselves and in order to become popular to men than those exposed to the neutral ads. However, there was no significant difference between both groups rating of beauty as being important for job success and for being a good wife. Her findings serve as evidence to the impact media images can have on women's perceptions of beauty.

Some may argue that Tan's findings are now outdated, however, several other more recent studies explain how the media can still have this effect. Goodman, Morris, and Sutherland (2008) looked at a different medium—magazines—and still found support for the effect of different media images of beauty on viewers. Similar to Tan, these researchers looked at a type of media marketing in their study on college women's responses to advertising models. These researchers adapted classifications and descriptions of beauty types from the work of Solomon, Ashmore, and Longo (1992) and their seven beauty types. Based on the models used for their analysis, Goodman et al. (2005) grouped beauty types into two categories. The first, labeled as CCG, consisted of the classic beauty type ("perfect, symmetrical physical features; soft, romantic look; classic or classy attire; soft makeup"); the cute beauty type ("child-like or youthful physical features and attire; these women tend to look like fresh-faced teenagers"); and the girl-next-door beauty type ("natural appearance [doesn't look like they're wearing make-up], simple attire, athletic looking, tend to look a little older than *cute* women") (Goodman et al., 2008, p. 152).

The second group, labeled as SS, included the sensual/erotic beauty type ("symmetrical facial features; sexual look but still classy and more understated in its sexuality"); and the sex kitten/sexual beauty type ("overtly sexual with a sexual look and attire") (Goodman et al., 2008, p. 152). Their classifications did not include the seventh beauty type from the original study, trendy ("offbeat look and attire, perhaps flawed or asymmetrical in contrast to the *classic* beauty") because it was not easily identifiable and defined by the young women (Goodman et al., 2008, p. 152).

Pictures of models were taken from *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, *In Style*, and *Allure* and shown to female undergraduates. The researchers found that the two dimensions of beauty CCG and SS were not mutually exclusive. Their findings also suggest that women view beauty as being

multidimensional, which supports past scholars' definitions. The female participants had a more negative reaction when viewing models that fit more in the SS category while models that fit more in the CCG category caused more positive feelings. The scholars theorized that the CCG model may have produced feelings of pleasure, arousal, and dominance because of previous research findings which stated that "self-improvement and self-evaluation comparisons [produce] pleasurable feelings" therefore, "the images protect[ed], maintain[ed], and enhance[ed] women's self-perception. The models that fit within the CCG beauty type produced positive feelings because women were able to compare and evaluate themselves based on similar images. The SS model, on the other hand, could have produced negative responses because of the lack of similarities with the respondents. The researchers argued that it could be equated to the fact that the respondents were jealous of what they may have considered to be an unattainable beauty style. Again, these findings serve as more recent evidence that media images do have an impact on women's perceptions of beauty. Furthermore, this study helps to explain how women judge themselves based on comparisons with media images.

Continuing the research on beauty portrayals in this medium, Park (2005) conducted a study surveying college women to see the relationship between beauty images in fashion magazines and the women's desire to be thin. Her research was fueled by the mass media's effect on women's attitudes towards eating and body images. Through her methodology, she found that fashion magazine images had both a direct and indirect effect on college female students' desire to be thin. The women who identified themselves as readers of fashion magazines recognized the presence of idealized thin images. Park argued that this had a direct effect, pressuring the women to abide by this requirement. However, an indirect effect caused the women to place additional pressure on themselves to be thin. According to the survey results, the

college women believed that the media images had a larger effect on other members of society, causing them to prefer the thin body type as well. This indirect media influence can be described as the influence of presumed influence, a model that is an extension of the original third-person effect model. According to this model, "people will perceive some influence of communication on others and as a result will change their own attitudes or behaviors accordingly" (Park, 2005, p. 596). While this study illustrates how the media can produce images that effect women's perceptions of beauty and themselves, it also illustrates how this effect can happen directly or indirectly, with the viewer being somewhat unaware.

Findings such as those of Park (2005) helped to show the link between idealized media images of severely thin young women and body dissatisfaction (which contributes to depression) and eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa. Krcmar, Giles, & Helme (2008) decided to further that research and explored the effects of magazines featuring these idealized thin images on college women. They found support for previous arguments that media's portrayal of the ideal thin image does have an effect on "lower appearance and weight esteem" (p. 125). They also found that two factors served a mediating role with this effect—interpersonal norms communicated by their peers and parents and the females' tendency to compare themselves and their appearance to others. This study reinforces the idea that women use media images of beauty and compare themselves to those images—similar to what was found by other scholars such as Goodman et al (2008).

Although several research studies, such as those previously mentioned, focus on the types of beauty images found in magazines and advertisements and their effects on women, there are also a few studies that explore the effect of televised images not necessarily used for marketing products. Aubrey (2007) is an example of one researcher who found evidence to support the

effect of televised beauty images on women. Her study was in response to several other studies which explored whether hypersexual media images caused young people to become irresponsible or obsessed when it came to sexual interactions. Aubrey took a slightly different approach and explored the effect different television programs had on college-aged women's sexual self-concept or rather 'the individuals' perception of themselves in the sexual domain' (p. 158). In order to see the effect of different sexual content involving women, or sex scripts, her methodology involved four different television program genres—soap operas, music videos, prime-time sitcoms, and prime-time dramas. The amount of television watched per day was also a variable considered.

Using a two-year panel design, administering questionnaires to college women, Aubrey found that the amount of television consumed daily was a negative predictor of the women's sexual self-concept. Accordingly, television viewing in general has an effect on women's sexual self-concept. Her findings also serve as evidence that sexual self-concept is negatively influenced by the sexual content present in soap operas and prime-time dramas. She offered several explanations for this effect. First, she argued that, in relation to the cognitive information processing model, the women encode messages that are realistic and identifiable. The images presented in these two genres often objectify women, stripping them of their sexual agency. Seeing these images could then have a negative effect on the women's perceptions of their own sexual agency. A second explanation she offered was that the women may suffer from body dissatisfaction after viewing and comparing the sexy, ideal images with their own. After assessing their shortcomings, they may lose confidence in their own sexual concept.

There was no influence on the college women's sexual self-concept by the other two genres (music videos and prime-time sitcoms). Aubrey argued that this may be attributed to

music videos lack of 'deep character development and storylines' which doesn't provide women with the 'narrative context to shape their sexual self-concept' (p. 176). With prime-time sitcoms, their purpose may be solely to provide comedic relief. Therefore, women may not take their sexual images serious enough to use them in constructing their own sexual self-concept. Not only does Aubrey's findings help support the argument that television images of beauty also have effects on women, it also raises an area of concern that the current study explored. While her findings found no support for the relationship between effects on women and television sitcom beauty images, the current study explored how women talk about and view beauty after viewing and discussing a sitcom featuring non-traditional beauty images. Perhaps the comedy tied in with the non-traditional images helps to reinforce the current beauty standards and frames of the media and/or the women.

Continuing the study of televised beauty images, Gallagher and Pecot-Hebert (2007) looked at another effect on female audiences by exploring three television makeover shows (*A Makeover Story, What Not to Wear,* and *Extreme Makeover*) in order to see how the idea of beauty is being communicated to female audiences. After analyzing episodes of each show, they found that this form of television programming communicates the idea that makeovers are a necessary practice women undergo in order to become socially acceptable to both men and women. The body is presented as a "product of consumer culture" that women continuously try to improve on by buying certain products or paying for certain procedures (p. 76). It is an ongoing process as women continue to make themselves better in order to "satisfy [their] own feelings of self-esteem and self-worth" (p. 76). These shows also communicate the idea that women's main motivation for such drastic makeovers is to attract a male companion. In addition, these beauty practices—no matter how extreme—are illustrated as being generally painless as

"the advantages of becoming a 'new you' far outweighs anything else including risks associated with surgery and psychological damage from low self-esteem" (p. 76). Berry (2007) credited makeover shows, such as those used in this study, as one of the media's key ways in communicating the acceptance, necessity, and popularity of plastic surgery. Although a different genre from television sitcoms, these findings also help to illustrate the impact of beauty standards and images communicated through television.

All of these research findings augment and lay a foundation for the current study in a few ways. They each help illustrate the effects of mediated images on young women and help in explaining the ideas of beauty that women may already have when viewing the media. These studies also present gaps that the current study attempted to fill. Very few studies explore the influences of television and sitcoms are not given as much attention because of its genre and assumed purpose (to provide humor). Also, none of these studies explore the role of "ugliness" in the media, which is due largely to the fact that it is never spotlighted.

Young women's ideas of beauty are created in part by mediated images, interpersonal influences, and social comparison. It is important to note that this study does not attempt to make the argument that the mass media have complete control over the beauty standards which women strive to uphold. However, the mass media have a potential influence (whether direct or indirect) on women's self-esteem, perception of themselves, and overall perception of beauty and its importance. Different media serve as key communicators of such idealized beauty images that provide young women with other objects of beauty to which they often compare themselves. Since depression can be a result from this social comparison, it is important to explore how different types of images being presented for comparisons are interpreted and what connotations are tied with these images.

The studies previously mentioned explore the effects of traditional portrayals of beauty (glamorized, "beautiful" leading characters), as does the majority of similar studies. The current study explores a more non-traditional portrayal of beauty standards (unattractive leading characters) to see if these images might have the ability to combat or to help reinforce the current beauty images and standards that young women use when creating their ideas, perceptions, and interpretations of beauty.

Satirical Media Portrayals

Although it is a safe assumption that *Ugly Betty* was created to entertain, one way to look at these characters and storylines is as a satire. This television sitcom brings forward images of "ugly vs. beauty" with different meanings. One possibility is that this show is a satire that brings attention to the traditional beauty images, such a those researched by the scholars mentioned previously. Satire is a humor technique generally used in order to attack the status quo. It is arguably "one of the most important literary forms of humor and has been used by writers and engaged the attention of scholars and critics for thousands of years" (Berger, 1993, p. 49). When utilized, the author often uses it to attack the status quo or "specific individuals or institutions or happenings" (Berger, 1993, p. 49).

Research shows that satire has been used in television as entertainment and a way to shine light on social and political issues. For example, *The Daily Show* is a fictional news show that mocks the news media. Brewer and Marquardt (2007) conducted a content analysis of the show and found that, through its use of fake news stories and interviews with real guests, the majority of the episodes discussed political topics and world affairs. A smaller amount of the episodes also discussed the news media and its type of coverage. The researchers argue that this satirical version of a news program has the potential to both educate its audiences about

important issues and to shine light on possible flaws in traditional news coverage. So while *The Daily Show* provides entertainment, it also addresses issues in society that may be easier to communicate using humor.

    The Daily Show is a fairly current television show that is still in production. However, there are television shows that are no longer in production, but existed during their production as satirical entertainment. Another example of a television show that used humor to address social issues is *In Living Color*, which was further explored by Schulman (1992). This sketch comedy show often featured African American actors and actresses portraying stereotypical roles. However, Schulman used this television show as an example of how satirical messages can serve a positive and negative purpose. Although the purpose of these stereotypical characters may have been to use humor in bringing attention to stereotypes it could have also been interpreted by some as a reinforcement of the stereotypes. The use of humor could be understood as justification for stereotypes. The same case could be true for the messages and characters used in *Ugly Betty*. The messages may be created in order to use humor and entertainment in order to shine light on illogical and unrealistic beauty standards. However, some may interpret these messages as being reinforcement for existing beauty stereotypes and standards. The current study explored these satirical images further to see whether they were perceived by the female audience.

"Yo soy Betty la Fea"

    Rivero (2003) conducted a study of the original Spanish version of *Ugly Betty* titled, *Yo soy Betty la fea,* using focus groups to learn more about the effect of this telenovela on Latin American women. The storyline for the Spanish version is similar to the American version, although not exactly the same. According to Rivero's summary, the leading lady is "an 'ugly',

clumsy, working-class, yet brilliant and hardworking woman who was employed at Eco-Moda, a high fashion company" (p.71). The leading ladies from both versions work in the fashion industry (magazine vs. company) and have similar personal and physical characteristics. However, the actual type of show differs. The American version is classified as a sitcom, which places lead characters in different amusing situations, while the Spanish version is a telenovela, which normally features "an almost impossible love between a woman and a man from different social classes" (p. 71). The telenovela also offers a larger cast of "ugly characters" than those showcased in the American version.

In Rivero's study, when asked who created the definitions for "beauty" and "ugliness", the participants provided three groups that could work collectively or alone: (1) the media and society, (2) class and race, and (3) gender relations and power. Media and society were said to create these definitions because, "television, magazines, and media in general construct idealized female bodies that do not correspond to their 'real life counterparts'" (p. 77). Class and race defined beauty because those who had the financial means (to become attractive), had an acquired taste (the upper class), or were part of the superior race, were able to become beautiful. In terms of gender relations and power, some of the respondents argued that beauty was defined by men and serve as a way to hurt women's self-esteem. These definitions of beauty were said to be oppressive and to cause pressure on women to meet these standards.

Rivero closed her analysis by suggesting that a similar analysis be conducted on the U.S. version of the show. Her analysis focused on the ways in which Latin American women assigned responsibility for the high standards of beauty and the idealistic definitions that exist. This study focused on the way in which the media framing of beauty and alternative framing of beauty in

Ugly Betty allows American college-aged women to explore and critique standards of beauty and ugliness.

<div align="center">**Theoretical Framework**</div>

Framing

Framing essentially looks at how information about issues, objects, and events are packaged or discussed. The debate continues over whether framing is a theory in itself or rather an extension of agenda setting whereby certain attributes are stressed pertaining to issues made salient in the media agenda (agenda setting). However, for the purpose of this study, framing was defined and utilized as its own theory as it does not solely consider the salience of attributes, but also of the packaging of information that helps guide individuals' understanding of information and experiences.

In accordance with framing, media do not only have the power to tell people what to view as being important, they also have the power and tendency to provide a lens through which audience's can view these salient items. These lenses, or rather, frames, affect the way that audiences view and judge a particular issue. Reese (2001) argued that "frames are *organizing* principles that are socially *shared* and *persistent* over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure* the social world" (p. 11, italics in original). According to Entman (2007), framing can be described as "culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (p. 164). Furthermore, the manipulation of key factors in the narrative, "introduce[s] or raise[s] the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, [serving as] activation schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel and decide in a particular way" (p. 164). This process of framing can be purposeful on part of the message sender, but can also be done unintentionally (Gamson,

1989). The process of framing organizes and packages information, stressing certain attributes and ideas, which then help to guide people's understandings and interpretations.

There are several different techniques that can be used to frame or package information in order to create a lens for the message's receiver. Some of the more popular framing devices include, but are not limited to, the presence and absence of keywords, metaphors, catch phrases/stock phrases, stereotypical language or images, exemplars, depictions, and themes (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1989). These framing devices are often used by the media in a way that is not clearly recognizable on the surface, but still serves the functions of a frame, such as "defining a problem, diagnosing a cause, making a moral judgment, and suggesting remedies" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Furthermore, Gandy (2001) argued that media frames function to "direct attention and then guide the processing of information so that a preferred reading of the facts comes to dominate public opinion" (p. 365).

Although much of framing research focuses on news media, there were a few specific framing studies that guided this study as they helped illustrate how framing can be used in entertainment media as well. Simons, Van den Bulck, and Van Grop (2007) conducted one of the few studies that explored the use of framing in an entertainment television show. These scholars looked at the way in which alcohol consumption was framed on the popular television show, *The OC*. Within this quantitative study where the scholars coded 51 episodes from the first two seasons, four frames emerged. The scholars grouped the frames into two groups—major and minor frames. The major frames were defined as those that emerged in the majority of the episodes. The two major frames that emerged were: (1) drinking alcohol was a necessity for celebratory and/or social events and (2) drinking alcohol was a way to escape reality when problems arise. The minor frames were defined as those that emerged in a smaller amount of

episodes. The two minor frames were: (1) drinking alcohol was not necessary for celebrations and (2) drinking alcohol was a sickness when it becomes an uncontrollable habit. This study served as an example of a framing analysis conducted using a television show. Although it does not focus on the same type of issue as this thesis, that particular study provided evidence that entertainment media, such as television shows, can also use frames in its messages.

There has been no research in the field of communication on the framing of beauty in the media. However, Kim and Willis (2007) conducted research looking at how obesity was framed by the media—a topic that can falsely relate to beauty requirements for women. Referring back to the earlier discussion of beauty, obesity is looked down upon and is not correlated with the ideal beauty. These researchers conducted a content analysis of 300 newspaper articles and 200 transcripts from television news. They found that the media framed obesity as being a large problem in society. Responsibility for this problem was framed as being that of individuals in society who make choices (e.g., eating unhealthy foods, not exercising) that result in obesity. Their study looked at how obesity is framed in terms of responsibility rather than in terms of what it actually means. Again, this study did not focus on obesity as it relates to beauty standards, nor did it study other physical beauty requirements. Yet, Kim and Willis's study served as proof that the media are also capable of framing characteristics and concepts related to beauty or physical appearance.

Young (2005) also recognized this framing of obesity by the media and criticized popular magazines for the way in which it was commonly done. She argued that magazines frame fatness and obesity as the same thing, when they are not always related. Magazines are an example of a form of entertainment media which contain, "narratives encircling fat women's bodies [which promote]…underachievement, unrealized potential, failure, [and] the body as an incomplete

project" (p. 250). The current study focused on a different type of entertainment media; however, the aforementioned study raises a good point about the framing of obesity by popular culture. She argued that framing obesity in a negative way and equating obesity to fatness can cause women to create a negative identity about themselves. With these results in mind, this thesis also paid attention to whether or not the viewers of *Ugly Betty* felt this way about the leading lady's body style as well as her other attributes. Also, another consideration was if the unique framing of beauty in *Ugly Betty* caused a negative or positive identification for women.

The final study that was used to aid the development and execution of this study was conducted by Kamhawi and Grabe (2008). The two researchers looked at the different way in which news valence frames were perceived differently between genders. With this thesis focusing on framing influences on women, this study shines light into how females interpret frames. These scholars conducted their study with a group of men and women (36 males/39 females), showing them a negative news story framed with either an entirely positive/negative frame, or a mix of the two. In order to create a comfortable, and realistic viewing environment, the study was conducted in a room similar to a living room. They found that women were less likely than men to enjoy negatively framed news stories. Women "enjoy it less, are less able to identify with people who are featured in such stories, and are less appreciative of the journalistic effort in reporting negative framed stories" (Kamhawi & Grabe, 2008, p. 48).

This could possibly prove to be true in the framing of subjects in entertainment media as well. For example, if the women personally identify with Betty (from *Ugly Betty),* this could influence how they choose to define ugliness and beauty. Additionally, when considering the context in which young women's perceptions of beauty in *Ugly Betty* would be collected, it was important to create such a comfortable environment for the women to view the clip and discuss

their view and opinions. Thus, this thesis (similar to the Kamhawi & Grabe, 2008 study) attempted to make a comfortable research environment where the focus groups were conducted.

This thesis helps add to the body of framing literature by illustrating the role beauty portrayals found in a television sitcom might play on audience members' perceptions and interpretations of beauty. A qualitative framing analysis of beauty helps to explore this possible media influence, rather than a direct effect. No published study had been conducted to date on the way in which beauty was framed by the media. However, the research on beauty's portrayals in the media and on the definition created by society helps to show how this concept is framed. For example, the media's visual depiction of beauty, which is usually the same across media and matches society's definition, helps to frame beauty for its audience. Also, the absence of "ugly" in media helps to frame attractiveness as being more important or acceptable. Even with society's traditional definitions of beauty that were discussed earlier, the definitions and consequences attached to meeting those standards help to frame beauty and ugliness for women. For example, with the positive consequences attached to beauty, it is framed in a more acceptable and positive light than ugliness.

Framing is the theory that primarily guided this thesis, but past research studies on beauty and its presence/influence in the media have offered other theoretical perspectives that need to be considered: third-person effects and social comparison theory. Each of these theories has been used in past research of media effects, including those focusing on the role of beauty, some of which are referenced above. These theories can help to explain the influence that beauty images have on women and the way in which they are interpreted.

Third-Person Effects

Davison (1983) conducted research on what he coined as the third-person effect. Through conducting four individual experiments, he found support for his hypothesis which states that, individual viewers of persuasive (whether intentionally or unintentionally) mass media messages suspect that the content will have a larger effect on other viewers rather than on themselves. He argued that although this effect had been noticed in past research it had never been explored extensively. He also suggested that the third-person effect could play a role in pluralistic ignorance and the spiral of silence. In relationship to pluralistic ignorance, individuals may think they are the only ones to hold certain views and opinions about a given topic. Davison argued that this could be due in part to the fact that some individuals feel as if other people are brainwashed by the media, thereby automatically agreeing with popular culture's views. The spiral of silence is based on the premise that, with the discussion of an issue or topic, one side is significantly more vocal with their opinion whereas the other group is relatively in silence. Again, Davison sees third-person effect as playing a role in this theory arguing that individuals who are silenced do not speak out against opposing views because they feel as if the majority of individuals have been influenced by their persuasive attempts even if they haven't themselves. It was the connections that the third-person effect had with other communication theories and concepts such as these that added to the hypothesis' appeal and importance (Andsager & White, 2007).

Although it took several years for researchers to take the idea of the third-person effect and test its reliability, the concept was eventually embraced by several scholars and used to illustrate the effect of mass media messages on different audiences (Andsager & White, 2007; e.g., see above Park, 2005). Davison (1996) argued that the several studies conducted exploring

the third-person effects of different mediums and genres illustrates how this hypothesis is "part of the big picture" and essential in understanding the role of communication (p. 115). This theory can also apply to the communicating of beauty standards both among individuals as women may assume media's and society's definitions of beauty to have this third-person effect.

There have been no studies exploring third-person effect in relationship to images of beauty and ugliness, however, there have been studies that look into how audience's perceive different types of television programs to have a stronger effect on others than themselves. Hoffner et al. (2001) explored the third-person effect perceived by community members in terms of the effect of television violence on audience members' beliefs that the world was a mean place (mean world syndrome) and that the best way to handle situations is through aggression. The researchers conducted phone interviews with 253 members of a small metropolitan area in the Midwestern region of the United States of America. According to their findings, the participants did perceive violence in television to have a third-person effect. They believed that others were more likely to have mean world syndrome and to use aggression to solve problems. The third-person effect was stronger in terms of the use of aggression cause by violence in the media. This correlated with the participants' willingness to admit their own case of mean world syndrome, more so than their use of aggression in their daily life. Hoffner et al. (2001) speculate that this is because aggression is considered to be more negative and considering the world to be a mean place is not as bad in comparison. These findings helped to guide this thesis as it illustrated how the perceived third-person effect correlated with the people's own willingness to admit their vulnerability to these media images. This raised a question for the third-person effect of beauty ideas and messages—will the women be more or less willing to admit their vulnerability to these images of beauty and thereby assume a smaller or larger third-person effect?

A study conducted by Wei, Lo, and Lu (2008) also helped guide this study, although it did not focus on the same topic. These scholars sought to discover whether college students perceived health news coverage in the media to have a stronger influence on others than themselves. They argued that health news was often not considered to be headline worthy but that it was still to investigate its effects on audience members. Surveys were used on 1,107 college participants in Taiwan in order to see who the students considered the media coverage of the avian flu outbreak to have a larger effect on or cause a bigger scare for. According to their findings, the college students did perceive the coverage of the avian flu to have a stronger effect on others than themselves. This third-person effect also served as a "brake on protective action" (pp. 273). Since the participants felt they were not affected strongly by the coverage of the avian flu, they were less likely to take steps to protect themselves from the virus.

Again, this particular study did not focus on beauty, but it did serve as foundation for this thesis. First, this study illustrates how college-aged students, specifically, can perceive media messages to have a third-person effect. Secondly, it illustrates how topics that may not be considered important or "newsworthy" by everyone can still have an assumed third-person effect which then indirectly affects media consumers. Beauty, although researched heavily in the past, may not be considered to be an important or newsworthy topic to some members of society. Thirdly, the findings help explain how third-person effect can have indirect effects. In the case of the avian flu, those who did not feel affected were more likely to not take preventive measures. Relating to beauty, if women consider those media images to have a third-person effect, they may not consider it important to help combat the unrealistic standards that media creates for society. Wei, Lo, and Lu (2008) helped to lay a lot of foundation for this thesis and presented several factors to consider during the analysis stage.

Social Comparison Theory

Leon Festinger introduced the social comparison theory in 1954 which was his attempt to explore "how individuals use groups to fulfill the informational need to evaluate their abilities and opinions" (Suls & Wheeler, 2000, p. 4). His research was guided by the fact that individuals have a general desire to: (1) know if their opinions and views matched that of others and (2) assess what they are capable of doing through comparison of what others are capable of doing. In order to make judgments about one's capabilities, opinions, views, actions, etc., individuals compare themselves to other people and look for similarities.

Further exploration of the theory found that social comparison involves an observer and a model, both of which have some general similarities. The shared traits create a sense of identification for the observer and makes imitation easier. If positive qualities and consequences are attributed to the qualities, views, and actions of the model, then the observer would judge his or her own actions in comparison and imitate accordingly (Wheeler, 1991). However, social comparison can also have its biases. According to Goethals and Klein (2000) individuals can choose to base their comparisons on real information or based on their thoughts of other individuals "that may have anywhere from an imperfect relation to social reality to no relation at all" (p. 32).To relate this theory more specifically to beauty, women may compare themselves to other women (similarity being in their gender and other possible factors such as age, race, etc.) to judge their own level of physical attractiveness, how they may need to look, and/or their ability to be beautiful (e.g., see above Aubrey, 2007; Krcmar, Giles, & Helme, 2008). In terms of comparison based on thoughts rather than entirely true information, this could refer to the information women may use from media images to compare their own beauty image and its acceptability.

Several studies have used social comparison in exploring media consumers' evaluation of their own appearance and how the media images serve as models for comparisons. A couple examples of such were discussed earlier in the review of research on mediated beauty images. For example, Krcmar, Giles, & Helme (2008) found evidence in their study that supported the argument that women use images in magazines as models of comparisons. Those scholars found that, when women compare themselves to these models in the media, it leads to body dissatisfaction and lower self esteem as the women feel like they cannot measure up to those images. In terms of this thesis, the women are asked to discuss beauty and ugliness in order to see if this social comparison takes place for both ends of the spectrum. Furthermore, findings such as those of Krcmar, Giles, & Helme (2008) illustrate the negative impact of social comparison and also raise the question of whether images of ugliness in the media have the same influence.

Sohn (2009) sought to find whether social comparison was more likely among female or male media audience members. In order to explore this topic, anonymous surveys were conducted with a group of 134 college males and females. The results of those surveys showed that, for men, 'social comparison was not a significant predictor of their body dissatisfaction' (p. 32). Images in television created a smaller difference between the men's actual body size and their ideal body size. However, images in magazines increased this difference. For women, on the other hand, social comparison to images in television and magazines was directly linked to lower body satisfaction and a larger gap between their actual body size and what they considered to be the ideal body size. Overall, the women were more influenced by social comparisons of themselves with images they saw in the media. Sohn's (2001) study helps to illustrate the importance of exploring social comparison and its relationship with women's perceptions of

beauty. His study also helps explain the negative influence social comparison can have on women's self esteem and satisfaction with oneself. Since *Ugly Betty* presents a new framing of beauty and ugliness, it is important to see if this social comparison is still as strong or if this alternative framing helps to remedy this problem.

Research Questions

Considering the idea of beauty, the prevalence of media and audience frames, the several different framing devices, secondary theories to consider, and the past research done in regards to beauty, media effects, and framing that relates to this study, the following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: In what ways, if any, does discussion of beauty shape or create new interpretations of existing beauty frames?

RQ 2: What role can an alternative framing of beauty, as depicted in *Ugly Betty,* play in women's interpretation of beauty?

RQ 3: Do female college-aged audience members perceive beauty images to have a third-person effect?

RQ 4: Do female college-aged audience members use social comparisons when interpreting and creating beauty frames?

Method

Guided by the research questions, a methodology for this study was constructed and implemented in order to answer the research questions and to assess the influence of *Ugly Betty* on college-aged female audience members' perceptions of beauty. College-aged females are part of a technologically savvy generation that has grown up with television and sitcoms. Most of these females also live within a community full of peer pressure and very little close parental

guidance. Surveys and other experiments are often a popular methodology for media effects, such as those mentioned earlier in the thesis. However, this thesis investigates how women make sense of mediated images of beauty. For goals such as these, methods involving discussion with or amongst the participants are most helpful. Face-to-face interactions with groups of individuals allow for a dialogue in which themes about a particular topic are able to emerge. For example, Buzzanell, Waymer, Paz Tagle, and Liu (2007) conducted a study using interviews with Asian, Hispanic, and African American women in order to explore the "ways in which ethnicity, as well as other identities, become woven into the accounts through which several women of color describe their transitions into working motherhood" (p. 196). These individual interviews with 16 women (selected from 102 interviews) helped to identify 'major themes and sense-making patterns about identity and values' (p. 203). These findings illustrate the potential and benefit of face-to-face, open discussion when exploring effects on factors such as identity.

Focus groups can be used to obtain this same type of information and is credited for being faster and less costly than individual interviews (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). According to Krueger (1994) focus groups are "carefully planned discussion[s] designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 6). A moderator or facilitator is carefully selected in order to guide the discussion and to create and maintain a comfortable, welcoming environment for dialogue (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). With beauty as the "defined area of interest," focus group sessions were conducted in order to assess the way in which young women make sense of what beauty is and the role nontraditional framing of beauty can play in this sense-making process. During the focus groups, the women were shown a carefully selected clip of *Ugly Betty* and were asked a series of questions pertaining to their perceptions of beauty and its importance for women.

Description of Participants

Three focus groups sessions were constructed in order to answer the study's research questions. Recruitment for each group called for no more than 14 college-aged females, in hopes that a smaller group size would promote a deeper discussion. Focus group research proves that larger focus groups are hard to manage the discussion and do not provide as much deep insight as smaller groups (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Only a small number of focus groups were necessary since the project dealt with a homogeneous group of individuals (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Following approval of this method and study from the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the participants were recruited through the Communication Department Research Pool and offered course credit as an incentive (See Appendix A for IRB approval letter). This process resulted in a 33 female participants for this study with an average age of 19. The ethnic breakdown of the participants was: 25 Caucasian, 2 African Americans, 2 Hispanic, 2 Asian, 1 Native American, and 1 Hispanic/White.

The female researcher of the study also served as the moderator of each focus group discussion. The moderator of a focus group session must be familiar with the topic being discussed and must be "compatible with the group to be interviewed" (Steward & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 21). Prior studies using this research method show that mixed focus groups used to discuss topics that are experienced differently by men and women will hinder the discussion and limit the quality of responses (Krueger, 1994). As the past research studies referenced above show, women deal with different beauty standards presented in the media and reinforced in society. Focus groups consisting of only female participants guided by a female moderator allowed for a deeper and more candid discussion of the role of beauty, its definition, and

importance. The female researcher was best for this role as she was familiar with the topic and related prior research. It was also important to have a female facilitating discussion so the participants could feel some commonality and feel more comfortable with the conversation.

Focus Group Layout and Procedures

Each session took place in a classroom located on Virginia Tech's campus and was moderated by the female researcher of the study. Research on focus groups as a methodological practice suggest that participants be placed behind tables so that they do not feel uncomfortable being completely exposed to everyone in the room (Krueger, 1994). Considering the discussion topic, this was an important consideration being that some participants may have felt insecure about their own physical appearances if it does (or does not) match with the media clip shown or other participants in the room. Scholars also suggested arranging participants in the room so that they could provide and receive eye contact from the focus group moderator and each other (Krueger, 1994). For these reasons, participants were seated around a table where their body was concealed and they were able to see each participant involved in the discussion as well as the moderator.

All of the focus group sessions were audio and video taped—common practice within research that uses this method (Frey & Fontana, 1993; Morgan, 1997; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). A female graduate student was present in each session to operate the camera and tape recorder so that the moderator could focus on facilitating the discussion. Once again, a female volunteer was chosen in order to minimize discomfort for the participants during the discussion. These recordings assisted in the analysis of the data and allowed the moderator to focus more on facilitating the discussion rather than manually recording the participants' responses. The female respondents were made aware of this in the beginning of the session when welcomed to the study

and were assured that the recordings would not be released to anyone outside of the research team (See Appendix B for moderator's script). The participants and video operator were asked to keep all information discussed in the sessions (including the names of participants present) confidential. Code names were assigned to each participant and used in the report of the study's findings.

Focus group sessions were conducted on three different days in November 2008, each session scheduled to last for an hour. After completing consent forms and being introduced to the study and topic, the moderator asked the group of women a series of questions about their view of beauty and ugliness, its importance in society, and its prevalence in the media. Once the questions were complete, the women viewed a small clip of *Ugly Betty* carefully chosen by the researcher that related to the topic and served as a good representation of the show as a whole. After viewing the clip, the female participants were asked another series of questions in parallel format to those asked during the pre-stimulus discussion in order to see whether the previous discussion and media clip provided the women with another means of viewing and discussing beauty. Following the post-stimulus exposure discussion, participants were debriefed and provided with the research team's contact information. Each session was then transcribed and the responses to each question were systematically evaluated and compared to determine the ways in which the female audience members made sense of and defined beauty before and after the exposure to the nontraditional framing of beauty in *Ugly Betty*. The questions asked during each session were paired with the research question it was intended to answer and are detailed in the following section.

Description of Stimulus

The clip was a small section of the first episode from the first season of the sitcom. The clip featured the leading lady, Betty Suarez, at a job interview interacting with another cast member who is her complete opposite (in terms of beauty/attractiveness). During the interaction, Betty's friendly attempts to converse are shot down by the other character's harsh and cold attitude. The other character was a fashion model who met the traditional standards of beauty. When called on for her interview, Betty is turned down by the male interviewer because of her appearance. Betty's bad fashion sense, which she seems to be unaware of, combined with her extreme friendliness, and the other two character's obvious disgust for her has hints of comedy which could be classified as slight instances of satire. By having two cast members representing two different physical appearances, the female participants were able to see the difference between what the TV sitcom defined as beautiful and ugly.

Description of Focus Group Questions

Each of the questions used in the pre- and post-stimulus exposure discussion were strategically created in order to help answer each of the research questions (See Appendix B for questions). In order to explore research questions one (pertaining to the influence of the discussion) and two (pertaining to the influence of the nontraditional media images), the women were asked to describe or define beauty and ugliness, what influenced their beauty standards, what role the media played in their construction of beauty, the evaluation of beauty standards, and beauty's relationship with success. The responses to these questions before the exposure to *Ugly Betty* helped to assess how the females initially understood and discussed beauty, ugliness, and the media's role in framing these definitions and standards for them. Comparing these responses to those given during the discussion after the brief media clip helps to show how the

discussion and/or non-traditional media framing of beauty and ugliness influenced the way in which the females interpreted beauty, ugliness, and the media's influence. In order to investigate third-person effect (research question three), the women were asked who the influence of beauty standards, and media's communication of such, was stronger on. All of the questions were analyzed to see if women used social comparison (research question four) in their discussions, evaluations, and critiques of beauty and ugliness. All of these questions as well as the stimulus and the layout of the focus group sessions were also approved by the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (See Appendix A for IRB approval letter).

Focus Group Analysis and Interpretations

Discussing "Ugly Betty"

Immediately following the media exposure to a small clip of *Ugly Betty*, the women were asked to explain Betty and the model featured in the clip. The participants were asked for descriptions of each character in order to assess how they perceived the media's framing of beauty and ugliness in the clip and how it influenced their discussion of beauty. Betty, the star of the show, is presented as a physically unattractive character with strong inner beauty. The show frames ugliness in a new and somewhat more positive light—ugliness is no longer associated with all of the negative characteristics explained in the review of literature. The model, on the other hand, is presented as a physically attractive character with weaker inner beauty. The show frames the more attractive character in a more negative light—something that is not common in media, as also explained in previous literature.

Although this part of the discussion did not occur until the second part of the session, it is important to first explain these descriptions. This helps when comparing the responses and identifying which parts of the discussion, if any, were influenced by the clip and/or the

discussion. If their responses to the questions following the clip correlated with the descriptions of the two characters, this could suggest an influence by the nontraditional media framing. However, if the change cannot be attributed to the clip, this suggests more of an influence by the actual discussion of beauty itself. Of course, there is also the possibility that the clip and the discussion share influence on the female participants.

Describing Betty. Several terms were used to describe Betty, including: nerdy, friendly, smart, ambitious, confident, outgoing, persistent, eager, passionate, driven, too extroverted, and full of life. No physical characteristics were initially used to describe Betty. However, when the females were prompted to address her physical appearance, the majority agreed that Betty was ugly, according to society's beauty standards. They continued to explain that they personally felt that she wasn't naturally ugly and it was hard to classify her as such because of the actress that actually played her. In other words, the actress who played Betty was not ugly, but her presentation was ugly. Participant Lily said, "It's not like she's naturally ugly. It's the way she's dressed and made up…It's the way they present her. It's all the stereotypes of ugly." Participant Lisa provided a similar comment saying, "…it's so clear that they, like, dumb her, like, dumb down her looks." Participant Jessie described her as a makeover girl and she added, "She's like one of those girls you're like 'she could be really pretty, but let's take her out of that suit. Let's do this." So the women interpret Betty as being a cute woman that is socially labeled as unattractive but has several positive inner qualities, such as passion, ambition, and confidence. It appears as if the nontraditional framing of ugliness was understood by the participants at first glance. In addition, none of the women personally identified with Betty.

Describing the Model. When describing the model in the clip with Betty, physical and inner qualities were used. In terms of inner qualities, words used to describe her included:

snobby, bad attitude, grumpy, snark, dismissive (to Betty), bitchy, and a witch. When describing her physical appearance, the women said she was tall, skinny, pleasing to the eye, good fashion sense, tight hair, too much make up, and too high fashion to the point it looked ridiculous. The group generally agreed that, while society's standards deem her as attractive, they personally feel as if she has only outer beauty and is ugly within. Participant Lily said, "I feel like she's kind of the stereotypical woman who's pretty and knows she's pretty. Like she acts like she's maybe better than Betty or whatever because clearly she doesn't want to talk to anyone different from her." So, although the model was described as the more attractive person, physically, her attitude was a big turn off for the audience. Again, the nontraditional framing of the attractive character seemed to be reflected in the females' descriptions. Even with this character, there were no participants who personally identified with her.

Discussion on Beauty

The pre-stimulus discussion began with the topic of beauty—the female participants were asked how they describe or define beauty for women. This helped to assess how women actually interpret the concept of beauty and if it has any similarities to the traditional beauty standards discussed in the previous literature. From the discussion, three common beliefs initially emerged: the participants felt that beauty was a personalized concept, it was closely related to confidence, and it was defined by certain physical characteristics. Changes in these themes between the pre- and post-stimulus discussion help to answer research questions 1 (influence of discussion) and 2 (influence of media framing). The absence of the "personalized concept" theme in the post-stimulus discussion suggest an influence by the discussion. The new emphasis on inner qualities, such as confidence rather than physical qualities, suggest an influence by the media clip. Each of these themes, changes, and answers to the respective research questions are discussed below.

Personalized concept. While defining what beauty is for women, the participants said that "beauty was in the eye of the beholder" and that people have their own definition of what they considered to be beautiful for women. The definition ultimately depended on the person who was defining it and how she perceived beauty. Participant Lisa answered, "But I mean, like everyone has different taste. Like what I think is beautiful might not be what you think. So it's kind of like based on your own perception or where you're from." Another example was found in Participant Rose's response, "I think everyone has a different concept of what is beautiful and what is not. Like to some people, some people blonde hair and blue eyes is the way to go. For others it's brunette. Or bigger boobs, bigger butt, thinner waist. It just depends on the person."

Participant May had the same interpretation of beauty, stating that the question was difficult to answer because of the fact that it is based on individual perceptions and preferences. May stated, "I feel like that is a hard question because so many people have different definitions, you know? And I think like everyone is pretty in their own way." Her response serves as an example of how providing a general definition for beauty is a complicated task. As a follow-up question, the participants were asked if there was any universal standard for beauty. While a few participants stated that there were a few traditional standards—The Golden Rule for a symmetrical face and the preference for thin over fat or tall over short—the participants still agreed that the definition of beauty is ultimately dependent on the individual person.

The idea that beauty was based on a person's own definition did not re-emerge during the post-stimulus discussion on beauty. It actually appears as if a new interpretation of beauty emerged. Perhaps the women began to realize, after the post-stimulus discussion, that there were some similarities in their responses with those of the other participants. In regards to the first research question, the discussion about beauty left the participants no longer feeling strongly that

beauty was difficult to define. By talking about beauty's definition, the women no longer explained it as being personalized to specific people. This is not to say that the women no longer believed beauty was "in the eye of the beholder," but they no longer devoted the discussion time to discussing how this is so. Instead, they used the discussion time to explain the ways in which beauty is actually defined.

Importance of confidence. As the preceding theme arose and the females stated that there was no general definition of beauty, they were encouraged to describe beauty, not merely from a societal point of view, but in terms of what it meant to them. From there, the confidence theme arose. Confidence was described as being an important characteristic considered when deeming a woman as being beautiful. When explaining how to define beauty, Participant Judy hints to confidence in her response, "Being comfortable with how you feel and how you perceive yourself." There was also a distinction made between being confident and being cocky, the latter of which being a quality of unattractiveness. Participant Monique stated, "I kind of think at the same time with confidence, like some people are like cocky or like you know they carry themselves with too much strut and they think they're too classy for people. And I just think that's a turn off for a lot of people. I think even for like guys when they see women like that." So while confidence was linked to beauty, a woman who lacked humility in conjunction with her confidence was no longer as beautiful.

Following the clip and during the post-stimulus discussion, confidence did re-emerge but it was not as dominant as in the pre-media discussion. At this point, the women included confidence in a different theme—the description and importance of inner beauty—something that was not initially discussed as strongly. When first asked this question in the beginning of the session, confidence was the only inner quality that was mentioned numerous times and a stronger

emphasis was placed on outer qualities. However, after exposure to the media clip, the women mentioned several inner qualities that were necessary for beauty. For example, several of the participants said that beauty was defined as being friendly, not rude, having a nice personality, being intelligent, and having a good attitude. Participant Macy described a beautiful person as followed, "Yeah, like they're smiling when they enter the room. And you can see their personality is nice and friendly." Participant Judy commented that a beautiful person has "a warm fuzzy feeling over a cold harsh attitude."

The descriptions of inner beauty included a lot of the same language used when the women discussed Betty and the model. Qualities that were considered to be positive in Betty— her attitude, confidence, personality, smart, etc.—were used in their interpretations of beauty. Also, the opposite of the inner qualities deemed as unattractive that were possessed by the model were included as well—for example, being nice and friendly as opposed to being rude and dismissive like the model. The similarities in the definitions suggest an influence of the nontraditional framing of beauty and ugliness on the participants' definition of inner beauty. In response to research question 2, the alternative framing of beauty in *Ugly Betty* did have an influence on the women's definition of beauty. Although confidence, an aspect of inner beauty, was mentioned in the pre-stimulus discussion, a stronger emphasis was placed on inner qualities following the clip and the descriptions matched those of the characters.

Physical beauty. Physical characteristics were abundant in the description of beauty during the initial discussion. Participant Lily responded, "I think there are always going to be some qualities that are deemed more attractive. Like, you know, thinner as opposed to fatter or something. Or maybe taller as opposed to shorter. I mean, it really depends." Continuing to include weight as a factor in physical beauty, Participant Zara stated, "In terms of physical

beauty, I don't think it's beautiful to be like stick thin. I mean, women were made to have curves and I mean if you're born that way that's one thing, but if you try and make yourself that way, I don't think that's beautiful." Zara overtly deems drastic thinness as being a sign of unattractiveness. She also subtly, and perhaps unknowingly, classifies natural weight as being a characteristic of beauty. While Lily's response matches the traditional framing of beautiful weight (thinness) explained in past literature, Zara disagrees and shines light on the beauty of natural, healthy weight.

Another characteristic mentioned, further defining the relationship between beauty and physical features, was the concept of natural beauty. Participant Ashley stated, "I think people can end up coming like over done if over processed, like so many beauty products and things. Too much make up, too much tanning, too much hair dye can detract from someone's natural beauty." Related to this idea of natural beauty was the concept of physical uniqueness and individuality. Participant Elizabeth responded, "Also, with like plastic surgery and stuff you lose your uniqueness when you get plastic surgery. Because then, like, everyone looks the same. Part of beauty is kind of the unique, being and having something no one else has." Both Ashley and Elizabeth contributed to the definition of beauty by explaining what characteristics were not attractive—those things that take away from a women's uniqueness. Unlike more traditional views of beauty, plastic surgery was looked down on by the females because it took away from a woman's individuality rather than adding to her beauty.

Physical characteristics were mentioned in the definition of beauty again during the post-stimulus discussion. However, there was a change in the way physical beauty was described. Unlike the pre-stimulus discussion where the females gave actual physical features, this time the women explained physical beauty as being about the presentation of self. Participant Macy

explained how a good presentation of self was necessary and not hard to do: "Yeah, well groomed and well kept. You don't have to put a lot of effort. Like you don't have to be completely done up." When the females described Betty, they shined light on how she was not ugly, but her presentation was ugly. Additionally, they explained the model as being overly glamorized or too "done up" to the point where it looked ridiculous. For this reason, combined with her attitude, the model was not considered to be very attractive in their eyes. Describing beauty as presentation in the discussion of the characters and in the discussion of beauty after the clip presents similarities between the two that suggest an influence by the media images. This finding also helps to answer research question 2, as the alternative framing of beauty in the short clip had an impact on the participants' interpretation of beauty. Like their explanations of the difference between Betty's physical appearance and presentation, their definition of beauty now focused on how beauty was more so about how people presented themselves. They had a new way of describing physical beauty for women.

Discussion on Ugliness

Following the definition of beauty, the participants were asked to define or describe ugliness for women. This was asked to assess the women's pre-existing views and definitions of ugliness and to see if it matched how it was traditionally framed in society and by the media. The discussion ultimately focused on two themes—physical ugliness and inner ugliness. There were changes in these themes that helped to answer research questions 1 and 2. Physical ugliness did not re-emerge in the second discussion which suggested an influence by the discussion. The stressed importance and reinforcement of inner ugliness appeared to be the result of the media clip's influence. Each of these themes and changes are detailed below.

Physical ugliness. During the pre-stimulus discussion of beauty, the participants

generally agreed that there was no universal definition. However, with ugliness, the emphasis

was on the difficulty of defining only physical ugliness. While physical characteristics were

mentioned by some of the woman, the dominant idea among the females was that there was no

way of characterizing someone as physically ugly and that it was more so characterized by

inward qualities than outward. Participant Ashley said, "Physically I don't, I don't think I ever

go through my day and look at someone and think 'oh their ugly'…I can't think of something

physically that I would categorize as like ugly or something." Participant Alice discussed how

the idea of inner ugliness comes with age: "I think like as you get older or you've gotten older, I

feel like you look more inward for beauty or ugliness." In terms of the universal definition of

ugliness, Participant Jasmine said it is, "more so than pretty, but I don't know if there is a

universal standard." Of course, it is possible that the females did not feel comfortable discussing

characteristics that created physical ugliness out of fear of insulting or offending other women in

the study. Mentioning physical characteristics of beauty does not carry a big risk of offending

someone, as beauty traditionally has a more positive and socially acceptable definition.

However, with the negative definition attached to ugliness, potentially tying someone in the

focus group to one of those physical characteristics may cause a bigger threat.

During the post-stimulus discussion following the media clip, the inability to define

physical ugliness did not re-emerge. This was not linked to the media clip, but is suspected to be

because of the discussion. There is still the possibility that discussing physical characteristics of

ugliness was uncomfortable and too risky for the participants. Regardless, after the pre-stimulus

discussion, the women no longer considered the lack of a definition for physical ugliness to be an

important theme to discuss. In response to research question 1, the discussion did not change the

women's willingness to discuss physical characteristics of ugliness. Instead, it was no longer mentioned in the discussion of ugliness for women. This was also after the fact that the women saw media's depiction of an ugly woman. Despite this, the media image did not appear to have an influence on their opinions of female ugliness. So, in response to research question 2, the alternative framing of ugliness did not play a role in the woman's interpretation of physical ugliness.

Inner ugliness. Descriptions of inner ugliness were much more prevalent in the females' responses, presenting itself as another dominant theme in the pre-stimulus discussion. Inner ugliness was characterized as a person's negative attitude or bad personality. Participant Amy stated, "Attitude. I think when a girl, like she said, the cockiness thing. I mean that's huge. I mean if a girl, doesn't matter what she looks like, if a girl is too much into herself or something like that, you're just like that's not cute." Here, the participant explains how the inner quality (cockiness) is more important than a person's physical appearance. Having a bad attitude was also identified as a characteristic of inner ugliness and was believed to be more important than a person's physical appearance. Participant Alicia said, "I think the attitude though. Because, I know people who, when we first meet them they're really pretty and you're just like 'wow'. And then you talk to them and then at the end of it you're like 'oh my gosh, they're not pretty anymore.'" Participant Marsha offers a similar statement saying, "I think more of a person's attitude can make them come across to be ugly rather than physical things." Participant Jesse mentions another characteristic of inner ugliness that outweighs physical appearance: "I think you're ugly too if you don't have any substance to you. Like you know, there's a lot of girls that I feel like will, you know, look very gorgeous all day long and make sure they're constantly like checking their appearance but they don't do anything fulfilling with their day." These comments

are a few examples of how the women understood inner ugliness as being equal to having a bad personality or attitude and outweighed physical appearance.

Unlike the physical ugliness theme, the definitions for inner ugliness did re-emerge in the post-stimulus discussion and was still tied to having an ugly attitude or personality. The only difference in their definitions of inner ugliness was that the comments in the post-stimulus discussion pertained more to how a person should act properly towards people or within interactions. When asked what ugliness is, Participant Judy responded, "Rudeness. Just being closed off and dismissive." Participant Monique uses a personal anecdote which helped create this definition as well: "My roommate is very quiet, she doesn't have, like, people skills. And that's kind of what turns her off for people, you know, turns people away from her." Sharing her personal experience about her roommate helped to define inner ugliness as not being able or willing to communicate with others. Both Judy and Monique's comments are examples of the responses for inner ugliness in the post-stimulus discussion that mirrored the characteristics given to the model from the media clip. The model was described as being rude, dismissive, and unwilling to converse with Betty. Furthermore, these inner qualities she was said to possess was also why she was described as being ugly on the inside despite her attractive outer appearance. These similarities help to answer research question 2 as well. The nontraditional framing of ugliness in the clip of *Ugly Betty* reinforced the females' belief that ugliness was defined by negative inner qualities. The women still described a negative attitude as being a big characteristic of inner ugliness. However, the clip influenced them by providing them with a new way to define this negative attitude—it was now related to interactions with others.

Another similarity between the pre- and post-stimulus discussion was the participants' belief that inner qualities were more important than physical characteristics. Participant Lisa

stated, "I think its personality both ways. Like women are always saying things like, she's not cute but I like her personality…if they're cool then we give them more credit for their looks or if you don't think they're cool you take away from their looks." Note how Lisa still does not use the term "ugly," but explains the opposite of cute as simply being "not cute." Although during an earlier part of the discussion physical ugliness could not be defined, now it clearly shows that the opposite of attractiveness can be identified even if it is not labeled as being ugly. During the discussion, the women still refuse to define physical ugliness, but continue to rank inner ugliness higher in importance. Helping to answer research question 1, the discussion did not change their idea of inner ugliness; however, it did help to reinforce the idea. While openly defining ugliness for women, the discussion and other participants' comments did not encourage the females to change their understanding of inner ugliness. Rather, they continued to discuss it in the same manner.

Who Influences these Standards?

After the open discussion of beauty and ugliness and how each is defined, the women were then asked what influences their idea of beauty and ugliness for women. In terms of the majority, there were two major groups of influences—the media and people in their social environment. Both groups were said to have an influence on how the women defined and perceived beauty for themselves and other women. What is interesting is that the role of both of the groups as influencers was not largely framed negatively or positively by the participants. They were simply said to influence their ideas of beauty and ugliness in a certain way, not specifying if this was healthy or unhealthy for themselves. However, the way in which the influencers were discussed helped to answer research questions 1 and 3 (third-person effects). In the post-stimulus discussion, there was a larger focus on the role of the social environment and a

change in the nature of its role. This suggested an influence by the pre-stimulus discussion. The way in which the participants discussed the influence of the social environment on "other girls" and not themselves also helped to show that there was a third-person effect, answering research question 3. Each change is discussed below.

Influence of the social environment. One of the influencers often mentioned by the participants is categorized as their social environment—specifically family, friends, other girls, and interactions. This social environment was described as having an influence on the way in which the female participants dress and act. All of their responses about the influence of this group pertained more to how it influenced how they acted rather than how they evaluated beauty standards of others. Participant Beatrice responded, "I also think it depends on the social environment you put yourself into. Like, if your friends don't care about doing their hair and make up all the time then you're probably not going to care either." What is unsaid is whether this influence from friends who "don't care" is healthy or unhealthy. Another example is from Participant Jasmine who touches on the influence of family: "It's also like how you grew up in your family. Like your mom taught you how to or if your older sister took you shopping with her or told you what to wear or how to do your hair, whereas, if you're in a family that doesn't really care, then you learn not to care." It is clear that family influences the females' ideas of beauty and ugliness by teaching them how to dress or act throughout their life. Something else to consider that was not detailed by the participants, is where do their friends, families, and other parts of their social environment get these beauty standards. It's possible that the people who influence them may have initially been influenced by their own friends, their culture, or even the media.

The nature of influence is also unclear when discussing the role of other girls and guys. Participant Lily said, "I also think its interesting how when girls go out like on the weekend or whatever, the thing you kind of think of is how to dress to impress guys. But really, I think that girls dress up in order to impress other girls a lot of the time." Other girls influence each other through a competitive nature—females know what to do or not to do based on how other females will judge them. Something interesting about the influence of girls on girls is that when discussing it, there was not use of personal pronouns. "Other girls" were influenced in this way whereas with the discussion of media, family, and friends it was more so about the influence "I" have. This response helps to answer research question 3 about third-person effects. When discussing the influence of other females on beauty standards for women, the participants acknowledge the influence for others, but not for themselves. In other words, they expect those outside of themselves to be more vulnerable to the influence of girls on their beauty standards. Perhaps this could be attributed to the participants' unwillingness to acknowledge or admit their own tendency to succumb to peer pressure in terms of beauty standards. However, regardless of the reason, the participants did consider females' influence on other females' beauty standards to have a strong effect on others and not themselves.

During the post-stimulus discussion, family, friends, other girls, and a person's social circle were all mentioned again as parts of the social environment that influence women's definitions of beauty and ugliness. In addition, a new factor was mentioned as part of this influential social environment—setting and the people's expectations. Guy friends were not listed in this discussion as it was in the earlier responses. Participant Ashley's comment described the influence in the same way as it was before exposure to the video. Ashley said, "Again, I think it's the girls you're around, like I said, your friends and family. No one in my

family is very, well, girly. So, there's a lot of make up stuff like that I, like the things that I never learned about. It just wasn't part of my family." This is an example of how her family influenced the way in which she dressed or the beauty standards she held true for herself. Participant Marsha offered the comment, "I guess the people, like your circle of friends. Like if you're in a group of people who will be more judgmental about appearances then you would start acting that way, whereas if they look more towards the inside of that person, you would look more towards that too." In this example, the social environment is now described as having an influence on the way females judge other females and not just on the way the females decide to follow the standards themselves. So, while the discussion didn't change the fact that the social environment was looked at as an influencer on women's beauty standards, it did add to the way in which it served as an influencer. In regards to research question 1, through discussing its role, the social environment moved from just influencing how a female follows beauty standards to also how they evaluate beauty standards of others.

Influence of the media. The females also agreed that media played a role in their shaping of beauty standards for women through encouraging what they view as looking good or bad. Participant Rose stated, "I think the media will definitely shape people's definitions. You open a magazine and you see what to wear and what not to wear. Like how to put your make up on and how to do your hair and what not to do. There are a lot of celebrity comparisons in magazines that's like 'she looks good, she looks bad' and that kind of shapes our viewpoints." In the beginning of Rose's comment, it sounds as if there is a strong third-person effect and she is shaping it as if the media's influence is for other women. However, in the end she includes herself in the media's shaping of viewpoints. She also acknowledges the media's role without stating if it is positive or negative. This statement also presented the only real mention of social

comparison in the focus group, providing somewhat of an answer for research question 4. Although not as strong as suspected throughout the study, Rose's discussion of celebrity comparisons and how people use them in creating beauty standards and evaluating beauty is the one example of social comparison provided. If the celebrity comparison shape viewpoints of what is beautiful and what is ugly, then women compare themselves and others to those images when deciding if one is beautiful or not. The evaluations of beauty are based on comparison of some model. If the person considers the model to be beautiful, she will compare herself to that model and look for similarities and differences in order to assess her own beauty, or lack thereof.

Even with the comments that discussed strategies used by the media which could be interpreted as negative, the participants explained how the media played a role in influencing their standards but they never actually described this role as being a good or bad thing. Consider the following exchange as an example:

Participant Jane: "I think magazines too. People on the covers of those are unrealistic, I think."

Participant Marsha: "And now airbrush is used on the magazines. I always like when they put the movie stars on the front of the magazine. They're like 'oh my God we caught them without their makeup on'. It's like yeah, they don't look that good with make up on either."

The discussion of unrealistic images and airbrushing models can be assumed to be negative roles that the media plays. However, the women stop short of explaining whether or not these unrealistic images influence their beauty standards positively or negatively. It also cannot be assumed by their responses as unrealistic images could positively influence their beauty standards by showing them that media images are unattainable. On the other hand, it could

influence their standards negatively by setting unrealistic standards, among other possibilities. There are several explanations as to why the role of media was not described as being positive or negative. Perhaps the women assumed that it wasn't necessary since they were in a group of people of about the same age and the same sex that experienced the media in the same way. For example, the women may have assumed that explaining the media's role in portraying unrealistic images of women already implied a negative or positive role to audience members similar to themselves who were influenced in similar ways by the images. Another possible explanation is that the women may not have wanted to admit their vulnerability in terms of media messages. As teenage aged females enrolled in college, they may have considered it an embarrassing thing to admit that, with their wisdom, they are still influenced by negative media beauty standards.

In the post-stimulus discussion, the influence of the media did not re-emerge as a discussion topic. This was a surprising finding being that they just finished watching an actual media clip framing both beauty and ugliness. In terms of research question 1, the discussion throughout the session caused the women to turn their focus more on the social environment as an influencer, rather than the media's role. This could possibly be that the women did not consider the clip of *Ugly Betty*, the images shown, or any other media portrayals to have an influence on them. Perhaps the embarrassment factor played a role again after the post-stimulus discussion and media clip and the women were ashamed to admit how the media was a strong influence on them. Another explanation could be that the women actually considered the discussion they were involved in as being an example of the social environment shaping and helping the females make sense of beauty.

Media's Influence on Beauty Standards

After the women were asked to focus in on the influence of the media, they agreed that it did have an influence on their beauty standards. However, for this question, the women initially described the media's role of influencing their ideas of beauty and ugliness in a negative light. During the post-stimulus discussion, this influence changed and was explained in a more positive light. This change helps to answer research question 1 in that, yes, the discussion did have an influence on their understanding of media's influence on beauty standards.

Media was initially held responsible for creating unrealistic images that led to unrealistic standards—a role mentioned earlier, but now was being described as being negative. For example, Participant Rose mentioned unrealistic images in magazines: "I think its kind of a problem because if you look at magazines, models typically seem to be stick thin and then girls get this false impression that to be pretty or beautiful you have to be a stick figure and that's just completely unrealistic to have to starve yourself to achieve that beauty." She identifies media's influence as "a problem" and then her use of sarcasm—"to starve yourself"—helps to show the media's role in this negative light.

Another label given to the media as influencers also contributed to its negative role. Some of the women stated that the media were also hypocrites for not matching their images with their claims. For example, consider the exchange between several of the participants:

Participant Ashley: They're saying one thing but their showing the same thing.

Participant Tonya: Right, like if they think it's so good to change it, why don't they do it themselves?

Participant Jessie: I feel like with eating disorders and stuff, people have tried more and more to say its comfortable to be in your own body, but they feel like that's what they should say.

Participant Tonya: Yeah.

Participant Jesse: They think its necessary to say, but it's not necessarily what they're doing. They're saying one thing and doing another.

This interchange was about media's attempts to show diverse body styles or say that it's okay to be different in order to combat the rise in eating disorders among women. However, the women identified this as hypocrisy because the same media outlets that say they support these diverse images still show the same type of images. Attributing the rise in eating disorders to media images continues to illustrate the media's negative influence. An interesting change is that when the participants were asked to focus in on the media's influence, the focus was on how media images influenced women to view themselves in certain ways and make changes (or lack there of) to their body. However, when asked for influences in general, the women only focused on the media's influence on the way they evaluate others and not themselves.

During the post-stimulus discussion the women agreed again that media played a role in shaping their views of beauty and ugliness, despite the fact that they didn't identify it initially as an influence. The biggest difference from the pre-stimulus discussion of media's role is that now, it was being interpreted and described in a more positive light. The women explained that *Ugly Betty* was an example of media trying to break the mold and present new images. Other examples of shows and products that attempted to do this (e.g. Dove and *How to Look Good Naked*) were mentioned and commended for their efforts. Participant Zara responded, "Well, I think in the mainstream TV, it is becoming more prevalent to show like different types of

people…so that's helping to sort of bridge the gap between what is real beauty and what the media presents as beauty." Participant Lily acknowledged shows that enforced stereotypes, but gave credit to those that are trying to make a difference. Lily stated, "I think there's definitely some shows that almost critique it too. It's like, where there are some shows that are a going to enforce the stereotypes, there are others that, maybe even subtly, make you think about it more." In the pre-stimulus discussion, media's attempt to change stereotypical images was called hypocritical, but in the post-stimulus discussion this attempt is presented in a more positive light. The media is credited for "bridging the gap", subtly tear down stereotypes, and show real beauty—all tasks that are considered to be more constructive.

Although *Ugly Betty* was included as an example of a television show that attempts to bridge the gap, there is no evidence that the entire change in describing media's role is because of the alternative framing of beauty. However, this does help to answer research question 1 in that the discussion helped the women to slowly recognize the shows in media that are attempting to break the mold. After using *Ugly Betty* as an example, the women bounced several other shows and examples off of each other. They also referred back to their previous discussion of media by explaining how stereotypical roles in the media did still exist, but that there were positive images slowly coming to the forefront.

Media's Strongest Influence

Once the role of the media was identified and discussed, the women were asked who this media influence was stronger for. This was intended to see if there was a third-person effect involved when women discussed the influence of media. The responses show that, yes, a third-person effect was assumed, answering research question 3. The participants described the influence of the media as being age dependent. Older females were said to be affected by

media's presentations of beauty and ugliness; however, younger females were argued to be the most influenced. Participant Judy responded, "…I guess, like, as you get older you realize that it's unrealistic to be, for everyone to be like 5'10 and 120 pounds." Her statement implies that with age comes wisdom—older females are more alert to the differences between real and fake mediated images. Older females were also mentioned to have a problem with aging because of media images. However, younger women were still said to be more influenced. This assessment is not incorrect, as many of the research studies on beauty in the media are conducted on younger women as they are more impressionable. Yet, several of these studies—some of which are referenced in the literature review—use college women as their young subjects. The results of these studies show that college aged women, like those involved in the current study, are influenced by media images of beauty. The interesting factor is that the participants do not include themselves in this "younger" category.

Younger women were said to be more impressionable and less confident. When asked who was influenced more, Participant April said, "Probably teenagers and kids…just cause they're still developing their ideas. They're more impressionable." Participant Monique felt the age range was similar. She said, "…I definitely think that like it definitely, like, the pre-teen age to like, I would even say to the end of high school, because really you might be in high school as a female—you're still really confused about how to carry yourself, how to like, you know, how to be confident in yourself, what's too much, you know." Here is an example of the participants not including themselves in this "young, impressionable group." April discussed "teenagers" as if they weren't teenagers themselves and Monique cut off the age range right where it would not include them (the end of high school).

Participant Yolanda actually identified "their" age range as being the most influenced. She said, "I think our age is the most affected by it. Cause I still feel like a lot of people in our age range are trying to find themselves and figure out what their style is…" Although Yolanda identifies her age range, when discussing how they are actually influenced, her language switches from "us" to "them" when discussing how they are actually influenced. All of these responses and the women's failure to identify themselves with a specific group illustrate how they consider media's influence on beauty standards to be have a strong effect on others and not themselves. In regards to research question 3, the women consider beauty images to have a third-person effect. The media images presented by different media are expected to have a large effect on other young audiences, and some on older audiences, as it influences the way in which these groups perceive and interpret beauty. The participants are not included in either of these groups and are not influenced as strongly by the media. This, along with the earlier example of third-person effect, shows how Davison's concept can also be used when discussing women's perceptions of beauty.

During the post-stimulus discussion, the females still explained media's influence on ideas of beauty and ugliness as being age dependent. Although not as strong as in the pre-stimulus discussion, the majority of the participants still believed that older females were influenced but not as much as younger females. In terms of older women's influence, Participant Jessie said, "…I feel like younger people more, but at the same time, like the people we're looking at are older than us usually, or are older than you and its obviously affecting them because they're the ones representing it." Again, the participant doesn't include herself in the age group that is being influenced. When the younger age range is discussed, the participants still do not include themselves with that group either. The most common responses for those most

influenced were females who were pre-teens, middle school aged, or younger than the

participants. This younger group was still labeled as more impressionable and less confident.

Only one comment was made mentioning their age range as being influenced, but was disputed

immediately by other participants:

> Participant Judy: Yeah, anywhere from like 14 to 25. I mean we can all, we can all look
>
> at it and be like 'oh, I was like that' or 'I've changed' or 'oh, that's like a cool hair style'.
>
> Participant Lily: I would say even younger than that.
>
> Participant Jasmine: I would say it's starting to get younger and younger. I mean –
>
> Participant Brooke: Like pre-teen.

This re-presents the third-person effect as the women don't identify themselves with the older

group influenced or the younger group influenced. There were no major differences between the

pre- and post-stimulus discussion of media's strongest influence. There was still a strong third-

person effect discussed by the participants and younger women were still said to be influenced

the most. If anything, the discussion only reinforced their beliefs.

Evaluating Standards of Beauty and Ugliness

Taking the focus off of media, the females were asked how they evaluated or judged the

standards of beauty and ugliness for women. One common theme emerged during both

discussions—the standards for women are unrealistic. There was no change caused by the

discussion or the alternative framing of beauty. Participant Cindy responded, "I think they're

transparent. I mean, I feel like they're just, it, like it's unrealistic for the majority of the people in

this country, women can't keep up to those standards." Participant Elizabeth ties herself into a

similar comment, "I feel like they're not realistic. Like they always say, like you know, 5'10,

blonde. And it's like, I'm 5'2. I'm never going to be 5'10 and I'm okay with that." Participant

Zara shares a story about her 13-year-old niece who thinks certain parts of herself are beautiful or ugly because of these unrealistic images. Zara goes on to discuss how she tries to encourage her niece to think better of herself and to realize that the images that she sees in the media are not real. This story continues to describe standards as being unrealistic and even having a detrimental effect. Her story also reinforces the women's comments about how younger girls are influenced because they were more impressionable. The fact that Zara feels the need to "teach" her niece the truth reiterates the fact that she is no longer at that "impressionable age" and, instead, recognizes the unrealistic and idealistic beauty standards.

When the participants were asked to revisit this question following the video, the main theme (although not as dominant) was still that the standards of beauty and ugliness for women were unrealistic. The main difference between the responses before and after the clip was that there was a larger focus on *Ugly Betty*'s unrealistic images and other shows that fail to present true images of beauty and ugliness. The majority of the group believed that Betty was "unrealistic", "an exaggerated version of ugliness", and "the extreme." The new emphasis on Betty does not necessarily illustrate an influence by the media clip since at some points they were prompted to elaborate on the show. For example, if a respondent mentioned *Ugly Betty*, the group was asked more follow-up questions about the show. Also, if they were unresponsive to the question, they were asked about Betty. On the other hand, the discussion nor the clip changed the participants' belief that beauty standards for women were unrealistic. While this does not suggest that the discussion or media clip influenced a change, it may have served as reinforcement.

The Relationship between Beauty and Success

In the last part of the session, the participants were asked if beauty was important for success in four different areas—careers, happiness, popularity, and romance. These questions were asked in order to assess if the participants would describe beauty as being a necessary factor in each of these areas and to see if these ideas changed after the discussion and exposure to *Ugly Betty*. Changes in themes when discussing beauty and careers helped answer "yes" for research question 1—their belief that beauty was required for successful careers was influence and reinforced by the discussion. The discussion of beauty and happiness answered "yes" to research questions 1 and 2. In the post-stimulus discussion, the participants' initial responses, that beauty was important for happiness, was changed. The alternative framing helped influence them to believe otherwise. The discussion continued to influence a change in the women's responses by creating the belief that beauty was sometimes linked to unhappiness and not necessarily happiness. The post-stimulus discussion about beauty and popularity changed also illustrating that the discussion had an influence. While the women agreed in the pre-stimulus discussion that popularity was not linked to beauty, there was no consensus in the post-stimulus discussion. Lastly, there was no change in the discussion of romance and beauty. The responses did not suggest an influence by the discussion or video clip, although the pre-existing idea that beauty was important for romance may have been reinforced. Each of these themes and responses are explained in greater detail below.

Careers. Three themes were found in the majority of the responses about beauty's role in careers—it was important, it was important for certain industries, and it was more about the presentation of self. First, beauty in careers was explained as being necessary in some way for success with employment. The women argued that attractive women were more likely to be hired

for numerous reasons: employers go off of what they first see, people in jobs want to surround themselves with attractive people, and it is the determining factor when there are two candidates who have the same qualifications. Participant Lily believed that being beautiful makes you a better candidate in the eyes of the employer and may even give that person more confidence going into an interview. She responded, "…More attractive people are more likely to get a job. Just because that, like, that's just how society thinks sometimes. Or, I mean maybe it gives you an air of confidence." So, not only is beauty important for a career but it appears to be society's fault for making it this way. Participant Beatrice also mentioned confidence as being the reason why attractive people were more likely to get jobs. So, beauty was defined as being indirectly necessary for success, as it led to confidence which led to better chances of getting a job.

Secondly, beauty was said to be important for a successful career depending on the industry. More specifically, beauty was important if you were interested in working in entertainment/media. Participant Brooke said, "It depends on the job too, I think….like if you want to be a reporter, in fashion, its all about that." Participant April argued that it should only matter if you wanted to be a model. She said, "I guess it depends on the career. Like obviously if you want to be a model, you have to look a certain way. But other careers, I don't think it should matter." Note that April says that she doesn't think it "should" matter, not that it "wouldn't" matter. So even with her statement, it may be wishful thinking as to how society should view beauty in relation to careers and not necessarily how they do so.

Lastly, the females explained that beauty in careers is more about the presentation of self. Several participants commented that coming to a job interview presentable or taking time to prepare yourself physically for your job leads to success in your careers. Here, they were defining beauty as a person's presentation rather than their actual attractive physical features.

Participant Marsha said, "Or also, just how you present yourself. Like if you dress nicely or you look put together, like you actually care, people are going to want you to represent their company." Participant Rose discusses how taking the time to prepare yourself translates to your willingness to take time to prepare for your job. She responded, "And also, I think that if you take the time to take care of yourself and you come in and you present yourself well for a job and you look like you took a while to prepare and dress well and do your hair and your makeup and what not, then the person interviewing you is going to think that you're going to take the time to prepare for your job." So beauty, or how well you prepare yourself, was translated as representation of other important job qualities and is thereby necessary for success in careers.

During the post-stimulus discussion, a successful career was still said to be dependent on a person's beauty. The idea that it was based on certain industries or that it was more about presentation of self did not re-emerge. However, participants continued to express that beauty was important for successful careers. For example, Participant Judy actually uses an example from the media clip. She said, "In *Ugly Betty* he like, when she stood up he was like 'okay, how can I get her out of here. Like how can I say, like, no you're not acceptable for this position just based on your appearance.'" What is particularly interesting in Judy's response is that she uses Betty as an example as if her character is a real person. So, her response was based on images that she was presented by the media. Seeing Betty turned away from a job because of her appearance and despite her qualifications helped to reinforce the existing ideas. Similar comments to this that referred to Betty's failure in getting a job as a real life example of how beauty is necessary for careers, helps to answer research question 2. The fictional and alternative framing of beauty did have an influence on the participants' interpretation of beauty and its

relationship to career. While it did not change the belief, it helped to reinforce it by serving as an example for the women.

  Happiness. Although this question resulted in fairly mix responses, the majority believed that beauty was necessary for happiness as well. For some of the women, it was important indirectly since it created one quality that led to happiness. For example, being beautiful was linked to acceptance in society which was then linked to happiness. An example of this indirect effect was mentioned by Participant Jasmine who said, "Yes, I mean, I'm not saying that is right. But I feel that prettier people are probably more accepted in society and like more successful and would be happier…" Another common thought was that beauty was important for happiness, but only in the sense that a person considered herself to be beautiful. Participant Nadia argued that finding yourself attractive was important, "because if you think you're not beautiful, then you're just going to focus on that and not be as happy as you could be if you just accepted how you were." So, according to this participant, a personal definition of beauty is required and attempting to meet society's beauty standards would actually lead to unhappiness. Other comments included that inner beauty was necessary for happiness, putting time in to your appearance but women in a better mood, and beauty was important if it was a priority in females' lives.

  There was a change in discussing happiness following the media clip as well. Now, the majority of the participants described beauty as not being necessary for happiness. Betty was used as an example again and was referred to as a real person. For example, Participant Judy said, "She seems pretty bubbly and peachy with herself even though she's *Ugly Betty*." Again, using Betty as a real life example illustrates that the framing of the ugly character as being happy (an alternative framing) did have an influence on the females' perception of beauty, thereby

answering research question 2. The participants also explained that pretty or beautiful females can sometimes be unhappier than those less attractive because they have to always try hard to be beautiful or to make others view them as such. Participant Macy uses an example of her friend who she considers to be pretty, but unhappy. She stated, "…I have a really good friend who's like gorgeous. She's like supermodel…but she's really not happy. Because she has to try all the time, wear make up all the time." Unattractive people were also said to build confidence in other ways which then led to happiness. In the discussion before the video clip, confidence was still linked to happiness, but it was said to come from beauty. Through the discussion of beauty, unhappiness was said to have a possible link to beauty—the opposite of what past research shows traditional beauty standards as saying. So this discussion also answers research question 1 in that it shows an influence the discussion had on helping give new meaning to the relationship with beauty and unhappiness.

Popularity. Overall, the females agreed that beauty is not important for being popular. They believed that popularity is more about personality and, for some, this realization comes as a person grows older. Participant Beatrice said, "I think personality is more important for popularity usually. Like charismatic people are more popular usually because they're charismatic and charismatic people are generally liked." Participant Jasmine follows with saying, "I think that like the term like, the meaning of popularity changes as you get older. Like now it's like she said, the more charismatic you are, more people generally want to be around them." Middle and high school students were credited for basing popularity on beauty, but the participants generally agreed that the type of person determined if they were popular. Confidence was also linked to popularity—people who were more secure with themselves were more willing to be social and interact with others.

Although the post-stimulus discussion of beauty and popularity did not produce a dominant theme, it still presents a change from the pre-stimulus discussion. Initially, the majority of the participants agreed that beauty was not important for popularity. After the clip, the women were split, some believing popularity was still not dependent on beauty and others believing otherwise. For those who agreed that it was still not important, their argument was that popularity is more so based on personality and this is realized with age—the same as stated previously. However, others believed that beauty was necessary, one reason being that people 'naturally gravitate to attractive people.' Referring back go research question 1, the discussions of beauty changed some of the participants' perception of beauty and popularity. What was once a general agreement that popularity was not necessary for beauty, was now a mixed discussion in which participants were arguing for both sides. One possible explanation is that hearing the examples and personal stories from other participants triggered a different response among the women.

Romance. Beauty was most commonly discussed as being important for successful romantic relationships; however, it was based on people's individual definitions of beauty. Companions must find each other attractive according to their own standards, but not by media's or society's definitions. Participant Yolanda used herself as an example to illustrate how beauty was important by her significant other's standards. She replied, "I guess it depends on if your partner thinks you're beautiful, cause I'm pretty sure my boyfriend wouldn't be dating me if he didn't think I was somewhat attractive." Yolanda credits the success of her relationship partially to the way she looks to her boyfriend. Her personal experience helps to describe beauty as being necessary for romance. Some participants agreed that beauty was important, but was not the only foundation for a good relationship. For example, Participant Jessie explained, "I think that's a lot

of times like a very important part of a relationship. Of course you build on it but I think it definitely has something to do with it." Participant April argued that it was not necessary for a person to be beautiful by society's standards "because you see a lot of people who wouldn't necessarily appeal to the best looking person, but they could still find a perfect match." April adds to the idea that a person's own definition of beauty is important as she explains that what is imperfect to one person may be perfect to the next.

During the post-stimulus discussion, the same idea re-emerged for the relationship between beauty and romance. The participants still agreed overall that in order for a successful romantic relationship, those involved must find each other attractive—based on their own standards. Participant Beatrice brought up the idea that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", a theme mentioned at other parts of the session as well. She stated, "…beauty is in the eye of the beholder. As long as you think their attractive and they think you're attractive, it's whatever works for you guys." Participant Zara agreed that beauty was important when she said, "You have to be attracted to the person you love." She also goes on to say that it may eventually evolve into something more, but it first begins with physical attractiveness. There was no change caused by the discussion or the video clip on the female's perception of beauty's role in romantic relationships. If anything, the discussion helped to reinforce this idea. Perhaps hearing the several examples of personal relationship from the participants helped to illustrate how their pre-existing beliefs about romance and beauty still rang true.

<center>**Discussion**</center>

The current study adds to the research field of framing, beauty, third-person effects, and social comparison. Results from this thesis answer the research questions accordingly: (RQ1) yes, a discussion of beauty can have an influence on the way in which women make sense of beauty by either creating new understandings or helping to reinforce existing ones; (RQ2) the alternative framing of beauty and ugliness in the media influences women's understanding and discussion of beauty through the creation or reinforcement of the women's interpretations; (RQ3) the college-aged women consider media images and standards of beauty and ugliness to have a third-person effect stronger on younger girls; (RQ4) the college-aged women only slightly use social comparison in their discussions and evaluations of ugliness and beauty. The answers for each research question are summarized in more detail below.

Research Question 1

In terms of research question 1 and the influence of the discussion itself, the women's ideas of beauty and ugliness were impacted and slightly changed. The women no longer stressed how difficult it was to define beauty for women. Instead, the women used the post-stimulus discussion to define physical and inner beauty. Perhaps the women realized how beauty was not as difficult to define as they expected, after actually defining it together with other women. One could also assume that the women still felt that beauty was hard to define, but no longer felt the need to share it with the group since it was already established as a commonly held belief. However, other parts of the discussion show that the women still mentioned information in the post-stimulus discussion that was agreed upon by the majority of the group in the pre-stimulus

discussion. So even if some of the participants still believed that it was hard to define beauty for women, they did not consider it as something important to contribute during the discussion.

Similar to the pre-stimulus discussion of beauty, physical ugliness was no longer mentioned as being hard to define following the initial discussion. However, physical ugliness was still not defined in the post-stimulus discussion. It could be that the women did not feel as if discussing the difficulty in defining ugliness was something important to mention the second time around. On the other hand, it could also be that the women did not feel comfortable discussing the characteristics of ugliness in either discussion in fear of offending someone or naming qualities of ugliness that others may possess. Perhaps after the pre-stimulus discussion, the women felt even more uncomfortable discussing physical ugliness going into the post-stimulus discussion. Already having one successful discussion where they discussed the problems with beauty standards and its effects on females, the women may have felt that the chances of offending someone or sounding shallow increased when discussing ugliness the second time. If the women were actually more uncomfortable to discuss ugliness more so than beauty, this would serve as an example of how ugliness has such a negative, socially constructed definition.

The discussion also had an impact on the way the women described the social environment as an influence on their beauty standards. First, social environment remained an influence mentioned by the women; however, the details of what it influenced changed in the post-stimulus discussion. After the clip, the social environment was said to influence the way in which females decided to follow beauty standards and the way in which females evaluate beauty for others. The latter of the two did not emerge during the initial discussions. Secondly, the women mentioned social environment as the only influence after the pre-stimulus discussion and

they did not bring up the role of the media on their own. One possible explanation for this influence is that the women may have considered their dialogue with the other female participants to be an example of how their beauty standards, and evaluation of such, are impacted by other people.

When the women were asked to focus on media's role in shaping beauty standards, the discussion did seem to have an influence on the way in which the media's influence was described. The negative description used in talking about media and beauty turned into a more positive definition in the post-stimulus discussion. The participants initially described the media as being responsible for creating unrealistic images of beauty for women that had negative effects. However, when asked again, the women felt as if the media was beginning to show images that shined light on stereotypical and idealistic images. One or two examples of shows such as these were mentioned in the pre-stimulus discussion, but it was a very dominant theme in the post-stimulus discussion. Perhaps the women realized from the pre-stimulus discussion that the media's influence was beginning to improve. Also, the discussion of the characters in the clip may have helped the women realize how some media images were shining light on stereotypes. Even the women's mentioning of examples of shows and advertisements that feature more diverse and positive images could have triggered the other participants to think of more shows that are beginning to operate in the same way. Although this new description of media was following exposure to a clip of a television show with a non-traditional framing of beauty and ugliness, no actual connection was shown between their responses and the media images. The influence of the media clip can only be assumed, but not proven.

The discussion also appeared to influence the women's understanding and discussion of the relationship between beauty and success in happiness or popularity. In the discussion

following the media clip, the participants no longer expressed that beauty was important for a woman to be happy. Initially, confidence was linked to happiness—the source of confidence being beauty. However, when discussing beauty and success for the second time, beauty was not necessary because unattractive people found confidence in other ways, which then led to their personal happiness. The open conversation about beauty changed the meaning of confidence which then changed the definition of beauty in terms of happiness. It is possible that, through the discussion with other women, the participants realized that people who were considered attractive by society and the media were not the only people who were happy. It could even be that seeing the other participants and hearing them discuss their own personal happiness, served as an example that all women could be confident and find happiness, regardless of their appearance.

The discussion of beauty and popularity cause a mixed response rather than influencing the majority of the group to lean one way or the other. What began as a general agreement that beauty was not necessary for popularity was now a debate within the group. After conversing with the women about popularity and the general definition of beauty and ugliness, the women may have seen popularity in a new light. For example, following the discussion about how inner beauty was more important than outer beauty and how inner ugliness was linked to being rude or having a bad attitude, the woman may have decided that beauty was not necessary for popularity as much as other aspects. However, the conversation also reinforced the idea for some of the women that popularity was linked to beauty.

There were no changes in the way women stressed the importance of inner ugliness over physical ugliness and the relationship between beauty and romance. However, both themes did not change between the two conversations and it is possible that the focus group discussion

helped to reinforce their existing beliefs. For example, the women stated in both discussions that inner ugliness was about having a bad attitude which was worse and easier to point out than outer ugliness. Although there was no change, conversing about ugliness with the other participants may have only strengthened their beliefs. Hearing other people's comments, examples, and stories could have reminded them about how important inner beauty and ugliness really was in shaping a person.

In both discussions, the women agreed that beauty standards were unrealistic and unfair for women. The standards were described as being much more unrealistic for women and the cause of several detrimental effects including eating disorders and lowered self esteem. While this does not represent a change influenced by the discussion, there still is the possibility that the women's ideas about unrealistic beauty standards were reinforced. It is possible that hearing examples of unrealistic images of beauty in the media and beauty standards in society reinforced their currently held beliefs.

Throughout the entire session, the participants believed that beauty was important for romance, but was based on an individual's personal definition and preferences. Again, there was no change but the discussion itself could have helped to reinforce this idea. There were several examples used of how the women's personal relationships illustrate how beauty is important for romantic relationships. For example, several of the comments were about how their boyfriends found them attractive which is why they agreed to enter into a relationship with them in the first place. Perhaps seeing and hearing the group of females, who did not look the same but all had successful relationships, reinforced their belief that a person's own definition of beauty is necessary for romance. Answering research question 1, all of these findings illustrate that, yes, the discussion of beauty can have some influence on the way in which the women interpreted

beauty. The discussion can also help to reinforce existing ideas and beliefs about beauty and ugliness.

Research Question 2

The alternative framing of beauty, as explored by research question 2, did have some influence on the participants discussion of beauty. After viewing the media clip, the women's definition of beauty had a stronger emphasis on inner beauty. In the beginning, the only inner quality stressed in the discussion was confidence, which was seen as being beautiful. However, following the clip, the women pulled from the descriptions of the characters when re-defining beauty. Positive inner qualities that Betty was said to possess and the model was said not to possess, were highlighted in the post-stimulus discussion and described as being characteristics of beauty.

The definition of physical beauty also appeared to be impacted by the media exposure. In the post-stimulus discussion, the women began to describe outer beauty as being more about a person's presentation. This was very similar to the discussion of the main character, Betty. Several of the participants explained that what made Betty ugly was her actual presentation. This switch in the discussion about physical beauty correlates with the description of the character which the show labeled "ugly". What is also noteworthy in this finding, aside from the media influence, is the description of Betty itself. The women agreed that Betty's presentation was "ugly" which is to say that the women are able to actually identify or define physical ugliness for other women. This contradicts with both discussions of physical ugliness in which the women said there was not actual definition. One possible reason for this change could be because the women were just exposed to a visual depiction of ugliness. Another explanation could be relating back to the idea that discussing physical ugliness was an uncomfortable experience for the

participants. Perhaps explaining the character Betty to be ugly was not as risky for the females since the name of the show is *Ugly Betty*. The labeling of Betty could be placed more on the media than on the participants themselves.

Another example of the media clip's influence can be found in the post-stimulus discussion of beauty and happiness. The women now described happiness as not being dependent on beauty and Betty was used as an example. References were made to Betty as if she was a real person and not a fictional character showing how the media clip did have some impact on their definition. This also illustrates how even fictional media images can shape women's perceptions of beauty and ugliness. Regardless of if the props, costumes, and storylines are not real, viewers may sometimes use them as real life examples. Perhaps it is the satirical nature of *Ugly Betty* that helped the images to have this impact. The women acknowledged how the depictions of ugliness and beauty were a bit exaggerated and revealed stereotypes, which is often the function of satire. The images may have reminded the women of unfair realities which then caused them to discuss Betty as a real person. Of course, this would need to be tested further to determine if this was so.

There were also instances in which the media clip helped to reinforce the women's existing beliefs about beauty and ugliness. One example is with the conversation about beauty and successful careers. During both discussions, the participants explained that beautiful women were more likely to get a job and have better luck in the workplace. Betty was once again used as a real life example that, in this instance, served as proof that an "ugly" person has worse luck getting employment. So, in some instances, fictional media images can also help to reinforce existing beliefs. Again, this could be because of the satirical nature of *Ugly Betty* and its depiction of beauty and ugliness. The media clip also helped to reinforce the women's belief that ugliness was more defined by a person's inner qualities. The women continued to describe

negative inner qualities that were ugly, this time focusing on a person's attitude in interactions with others. The characteristics used to describe ugliness were the same used in describing the way the model interacted rudely with Betty. By their definitions of ugliness and the descriptions of the characters, the model was actually the uglier person in the clip because of her attitude.

Each of these findings illustrate that the media clip had some impact on the way the women defined certain concepts in the discussion of beauty and ugliness. However, there are a couple explanations for the influence the images may have had. First, the video clip may have been most accessible to the women when discussing beauty. While it did help to create new ideas or reinforce existing beliefs for them, the women may have pulled descriptions and characteristics directly from the clip simply because it was fresh in their memory. Whether or not this change in their ideas remained beyond the study would need to be explored using a different approach. A second possible explanation for this influence is that there could have been a frame transfer in which the media's alternative framing of beauty and ugliness could have changed or reinforced the audience frames. However, this type of frame transfer cannot be determined by this study.

Research Question 3

In regards to the third research question, the women did perceive beauty images to have a third-person effect. There was a small instance of this when discussing the influence of the social environment on women's framing of beauty. The women believed that "other girls" were influenced by each other because of their competitive nature. However, the participants did not include themselves in this group. The stronger third-person effect was exposed when discussing who the influence of beauty images in the media was stronger for. In both discussions, the majority of the group agreed that media's influence was the strongest on younger girls. Either the

age range of these "younger girls" was actually younger (ex. preteens) than the participants or technically included their ages (ex: teenagers) but was still explained as being for "other girls". Perhaps the women considered themselves to be more mature and less impressionable than younger girls or other girls their age, which is why they were not influenced by media in the same way.

On the other hand, the participants also did not include themselves in the group of "older women" who were slightly influenced by the media images. The participants' education—being college students—may have also led them to believe that they were less influenced by these media images. They may also have considered the influence of their family and friends to make them less impacted by the media. Of course there is still the possibility that the women simply did not want to admit to the fact that they were influenced by the media images that they had labeled earlier as being unrealistic and transparent. Past literature on third-person effect does argue that individuals are more likely to assume a third-person effect when this effect is considered to be negative and when they are least likely to acknowledge their own vulnerability to the media images. Admitting to be influenced by media's unrealistic portrayals of beauty may have been considered a negative thing by the women, which could have led to the strong third-person effect that was assumed.

Research Question 4

There was not much discussion of social comparison during the focus group session which was a surprising finding. The only instance found was in the discussion of the influence of the media and celebrity comparisons. The participants explained how the media's evaluations of celebrities help to communicate to society what is considered beautiful and ugly. Women know that if they look like the celebrities who the media describe as being "beautiful" then they would

also be considered beautiful and acceptable. The celebrity, in this case, serves as the model to which the female media consumers can use to compare themselves. Although this is one example of social comparison in the discussion, there was not a large amount through the entire session. Unlike past research on the use of social comparison in evaluation one's own beauty, the women did not make a lot of comments pertaining to the comparisons they make with themselves and other women in the media or in society. So, in response to research question 4, there was very little use of social comparison when the women discussed beauty and how it was framed by media and society.

Additions to Research

These findings help to answer each research question, but also add to several research fields: beauty research, framing theory, third-person effects, and social comparison theory. The following explains how the pre- and post-stimulus discussion with women about beauty and ugliness adds to existing literature.

Beauty. The findings of this thesis help to add to the research on beauty in various ways. First, the women's initial descriptions of beauty, ugliness, and its role in society did not completely match the traditional standards of beauty. For example, healthy weight was said to be beautiful rather than the traditional view that skinny is always more attractive. Another example is how natural beauty was said to be better than women over processing themselves or having too much plastic surgery—two beauty rituals that are traditionally thought to create beauty for a person. So, while some traditional characteristics or ideas were mentioned (ex. tall is beautiful or beauty is necessary for careers) in the initial conversation, there were also nontraditional characteristics discussed. So existing beauty standards found in the review of beauty literature are not all still used when defining beauty for and by women.

Secondly, this study adds to beauty literature by illustrating some differences when women discuss beauty and ugliness. The discussion of beauty included definitions of physical and inner beauty. The women explained what a woman needs to possess physically, emotionally, and psychology in order to be beautiful. On the other hand, when discussing ugliness, the women's focus was on inner qualities and no physical characteristics were mentioned. Lastly, the findings that help answer research question 1 illustrate how a discussion of beauty amongst females can influence the women's understanding of beauty, whether it's their own definitions or those created by media and society.

Framing. The answer provided to research question 2 helps to add to the field of framing and beauty in the media. First, it illustrates how beauty frames used in a television sitcom can have an impact on women's perceptions of beauty. Beauty is just another example of a concept that plays a role in society and can be packaged in a certain way before presenting it to the audience. This packaging, or framing, of beauty can both reinforce ideas and create new ones. Furthermore, the findings suggest that an alternative framing of beauty can have this impact. Traditionally, female beauty images are framed the same way, where the tall, thin, smooth skin woman is considered more attractive and is more acceptable by society—as illustrated in the literature review of beauty in the media. The women agreed that images such as these do influence women's creation and evaluation of beauty standards. However, their responses following the clip also help to show how the alternative framing of beauty, where the unattractive person is seen in a more positive light, also plays a role. This new framing of beauty and ugliness helped the women focus in on inner beauty, rather than outer beauty. These findings also suggest that college-aged women not necessarily agree with the traditional standards of

beauty. While some of the responses included characteristics of the traditional beauty standard, there were several mentioned that conflicted with the more conventional definitions.

Secondly, these findings help show how sitcoms can serve as a vehicle for frames and how those frames can still have an influence, regardless if they are tied with humor. Previous studies that explored the effects of mediated beauty images on women focused on different types of mediums (e.g. dramas, magazines, soap operas) and found that there was a media effect. One study which did focus in on sitcoms found that they did not have an impact on women's perception of beauty. This study illustrates that characters and storylines in sitcoms can also have an influence on beauty standards despite the fact that the motive of the show (a situational comedy) is to provide comedic relief.

Third-person effects. The responses which helped to answer research question 3 also help illustrate how this theory can be used in the discussion and understanding of beauty and ugliness. Several researchers use this theory to assess how audiences perceive the effect of media images or other types of technology (e.g. blogs, internet) on other audience members. However, this findings help show that this third-person effect can be assumed when talking about the influence of societal beliefs and standards. Not only did the women agree that media's unrealistic portrayals of beauty were stronger on younger girls, they also believed that younger girls were more influenced by their social environment's perceptions of beauty and ugliness. These findings also illustrate how there can be a third-person influence and not just a third-person effect. The method used in this thesis cannot assess a direct effect on the part of the media or the discussion. However, the women's responses to the focus group questions do suggest that the women assume this influence to be stronger on younger girls more so than themselves.

Social comparison theory. Although there was not much use of social comparison in the women's responses, the few instances that did appear and helped answer research question 1 do help add to this theory. Even the small amount of social comparison does illustrate that women can use images in the media to serve as models to compare themselves to when evaluating their own appearance and discussing both beauty and ugliness. The use of comparison was not strong in the two discussions within this thesis, however, the small instance of social comparison warrants further research on the use of this theory by women in discussing beauty and ugliness.

Limitations

Although the current study produces several noteworthy findings, there were a few limitations. Focus groups are a very good qualitative research method for assessing the way in which individuals feel about and discuss certain issues. In this study, the focus groups helped to assess how the women discussed beauty, how this discussion influenced their subsequent discussion, and how the discussion changed after exposure to the media clip. However, even with these findings, there is always the possibility that other influences played a part in the discussion which could not be assessed by the focus groups. For example, perhaps the women were reminded of person stories after viewing the clip that they then shared in the post-stimulus discussion. It may have also been the case that women who had seen *Ugly Betty* before were influenced by past episodes they had seen aside from the one shown in the clip. Another possibility is that the women's culture may have influenced their beliefs in ways they didn't mention and impacted their willingness to make certain comments. For example, in one of the sessions where there was only one Asian and one African American participant, it is possible that either of these participants may not have felt comfortable sharing all of their comments. They may have felt as if they were alone in some of their views of beauty and ugliness. However,

despite all of these possible outside influences, at this point and from these findings, there is no way to assess if this impact occurred. With this particular methodology, one limitation is that it is sometimes difficult to assess exactly what changes were because of the media clip, the discussion, or other outside influences.

Another limitation is that the focus group sessions were only for one hour. Due to resources, there had to be a time limit on each of the sessions. Considering all that needed to be covered during the one hour session, there was not much room to question the participants on their responses. If more time was available, the moderator would have been able to dig more into the females' responses and possibly pull out more valuable information about the topic. For example, with more time available, the moderator could have asked the women to elaborate more on why physical ugliness was so hard to define or to go into more detail about the cultural definitions of beauty and ugliness. The time limit served as a limitation in that the women were not able to provide as many responses as they may have been able to with a longer session.

The question of whether the influence was because of the accessibility of the information or because of a change in the females' actual beliefs is another question that cannot be determined by these findings. This also serves as a limitation for the study because, although the findings illustrate that there was some influence, the method used cannot help determine if this was because the information was the most accessible to the women or if it actually cause a long term change in their beliefs about beauty and ugliness. Since the focus group sessions each happened in one day and did not have a follow up discussion, there is currently no way to determine if the women carried these influences with them and still used them in their discussion of beauty and ugliness after the study session had ended.

Suggestions for Future Research

The limitations of the study as well as the questions that were left unanswered each give room for further research on this topic. To address the limitations, one way to continue this research would be to conduct longer focus groups, including follow up sessions, in order to see what additional information the participants would be willing to provide and if the discussion would change once it was revisited. This longer format for the sessions could also help to determine if the influence was only because the information was most accessible or if it actually did create new beliefs that the women carried beyond the session. In connection with the accessibility of the media images, one may look at the relationship between the images in shows like *Ugly Betty* and women's perception of beauty, using priming theory. Priming is the idea that the media provides its audiences with information that they can store and pull from when making sense of their surroundings—the more accessible the information is, the easier it is for individuals to use that in their decision making process. Future research on nontraditional beauty images, such as those in *Ugly Betty*, could be explored using this theory to see if those shows have a priming effect for women discussing or evaluating beauty and ugliness.

Descriptions of Betty were used in the discussion of happiness and successful careers since she was shown as a happy, friendly person who did not get a job because of her appearance. Betty was not used as an example in discussing popularity and romance, one reason for this possibly being that she was not featured in those scenarios in the clip shown. Another suggestion for furthering this research would be to use several different clips of *Ugly Betty* in several different situations to see if she would still be pulled as a real life example. In addition, the women mentioned several other shows that they believed featured nontraditional images like *Ugly Betty*. Future research could explore some of those shows, using several different scenes, in

order to see if they also have an influence on women's understanding of beauty and ugliness. Several of the examples mentioned were reality television shows, so perhaps future studies could explore that genre to see if it has more or less of an impact than the sitcom, if any at all. In the post-stimulus discussion, some of the women also expressed how some shows were beginning to bridge the gap between fair and unfair images. This comment presents yet another way in which this research could be furthered. A study could be conducted using a show with traditional framing of beauty and one with the nontraditional framing of beauty to compare the influences of both on the discussion, interpretation, and understanding of beauty.

Since the women considered beauty images in the media to have a strong third-person effect, an additional study could look to see if this truly was the case. A study similar to the current study, and addressing the limitations, could have focus groups using a younger group of participants. This would help to show if this younger audience is actually impacted more or if they consider themselves to be influenced more or less than females older than themselves. It may be the case that an even younger audience also considers media images to have a third-person effect. Another possibility is that younger girls may be more willing to discuss ugliness than the age group used in the current study. Each of these questions is certainly something worth exploring as beauty standards created by society and the media can have an influence on younger girls as well.

The last suggestion for future research is sparked by the women's discussion, or lack there of, of physical ugliness. One possibility addressed earlier is that the women may have felt uncomfortable discussing beauty in a group of females. Although they expressed that they could not define ugliness, it was clearly identifiable as they discussed Betty's "ugly presentation," her success with jobs, and her overall happiness. A future study could explore the concept of

"ugliness" by itself in order to see if women truly consider it to be a risky topic to discuss, and if so, how they believe this came about.

Conclusion

Beauty and its effects on female viewers has been the topic of several research studies in the past. Those findings illustrate how media's portrayals of beauty influence the way in which women evaluate themselves and others based on beauty standards that can be unrealistic. Until the current study, no research explored the influence of mediated images of both beauty and ugliness. As images of ugliness began to appear in the mass media, it was necessary to explore the influence of these images on women's evaluation of beauty. When considering media framing and reviewing literature on beauty, it was clear that the traditional framing or packaging of beauty was the same across several mediums. However, the show *Ugly Betty* took an alternative route by introducing "ugliness" and framing beauty in a different way.

Although limitations were present, the focus group sessions with college-aged females made a strong contribution by illustrating the influence of open discussions and an alternative framing of beauty. Not only did they help to create a new understanding of beauty, but they also helped to reinforce existing ideas. This study presents new information for the field of beauty and for several communication theories. It also offers valuable information for several other research studies that can continue to explore this topic. If these findings and suggestions for further research are explored, perhaps more can be revealed about the role of beauty and ugliness (whether positive or negative) in media, in society, and especially in the lives of women.

Personal Reflection

As the researcher, moderator, and a female within the same age range of the participants, the experience working with the focus groups was quite interesting and somewhat difficult at

times. The subject itself was chosen because, as a woman, I recognize and understand the beauty standards that women often attempt to follow and the detrimental effects it may have. As a viewer of *Ugly Betty* who was a bit refreshed to see a new portrayal of beauty, I wondered how my peers would interpret these images. It was not until during the focus group session that I started to worry that I may even make the focus group sessions difficult for the women. A major concern of mine, and still an unanswered question, was whether or not the participants would feel comfortable discussing beauty or ugliness with me, based on the way they actually assessed my physical and inner beauty. For example, I do not have perfect vision—I wear eye glasses— something that is traditionally linked more to ugliness than beauty. Furthermore, I was not dressed in designer clothes, I do not have long hair, and I do not have a slim body frame—more features traditionally linked to beauty. So, if the women considered any of my qualities to be "ugly," I still wonder if they would be open and willing to express this. I cannot help but wonder if they were hindered at all by my appearance. More importantly, I wonder if I would have been offended to hear my characteristics mentioned—or if I was even prepared for that since it did not cross my mind until during the first session. Of course, this could be the case with other participants as well or even for the female camera operator.

During the sessions, I also wondered what role my ethnicity played in the way the women discussed beauty and ugliness. In one of the sessions, I was the only African American present and in the others, I was one of two. The women identified culture as being an influence on the way women create, follow, and evaluate beauty standards. Again, I am left asking myself, "Were they afraid to mention something considered ugly by their culture that may be beautiful to mine?" It is also quite possible that my culture was the reason I agreed or disagreed with some of the beauty standards they discussed. At one point, the other African American in one of the

sessions mentioned how BET (Black Entertainment Television) communicated different beauty standards than CMT (Country Music Television). I wanted her to pull more information out from there. Why didn't she go into detail about how BET reminds us that the hair extensions, wide hips and big butts are attractive for African American women? But looking back, I cannot really blame her for not speaking up as I do not know the reason for her silence. Maybe she felt that she was the only one to consider that as being beautiful and felt alone in her comments. I only raise this suggestion because I wonder if I would have felt comfortable bringing it up. I am not sure if I would have been fearful that the other women would have judged my beauty standards. I am still not sure if society influences me in that way.

As a researcher, it was important to explore the topic without inserting myself or my opinion into my work. With this topic and my identity, this was especially a challenge. Often, I wanted to join the conversation so that I could share my personal stories and explain to them how I did or did not feel the same way. It was very difficult not being able to join in on a great discussion about a topic that I was also influenced by. At multiple points, I was excited to know that the definitions of beauty and ugliness in the minds of other women were beginning to change and were no longer restricted to the traditional definitions. I felt that we were making breakthrough—I felt connected with my participants. What was also interesting is that, as I sat through the discussions and then analyzed the transcripts, I began to ask myself if I was influenced by these images and was unwilling to admit it. This is yet another personal question that arose from this study that I still do not have the answer to.

Since I asked the female participants to openly discuss a topic that directly influences their lives, I thought it was only fair to actually reflect on how I handled this experience being a female myself. Although my presence may have impacted their willingness or unwillingness to

discuss, I see this as an unavoidable circumstance when using focus groups. For example, if the moderator met all of the traditional beauty standards, those participants who did not meet these standards may still have felt uncomfortable. I do still believe that discussions such as those from the focus groups can help women make sense of beauty and perhaps create more realistic standards. From sitting through each discussion and seeing the influence, I see this conversation about beauty as being necessary. However, considering the findings and my personal experience, I do wonder if studying women's interpretation of beauty would be better explored using a method where they feel more comfortable divulging information (e.g. surveys, writing open ended responses). Perhaps I can use this method in future studies as I consider my research on beauty to be just beginning. Still being unable to answer personal questions because of this study also makes me wonder if other women question the same things. This is only my evidence that work still remains to be done in terms of beauty research. Furthermore, the questions I raise as a researcher who is impacted by this topic possibly shines light on another need for future research. Perhaps it is time for researchers to actually look into how we are strongly influenced by our own research topics, even when we believe otherwise.

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FWA00000572(expires 1/20/2010)
IRB # is IRB00000667

DATE: September 23, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Andrew Williams
             Adria Goldman

Approval date: 9/23/2008
Continuing Review Due Date:9/8/2009
Expiration Date: 9/22/2009

FROM: David M. Moore

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "Beauty Through Their Eyes: An Analysis of "Ugly Betty's" Effect on Females' Framing of Beauty" , IRB # 08-541

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective September 23, 2008.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1.   Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

2.   Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

3.   Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.

4.   If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Important:
If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, please send the applicable OSP/grant proposal to the IRB office, once available. OSP funds may not be released until the IRB has compared and found consistent the proposal and related IRB applicaton.

cc: File
      Department Reviewer:James Ivory

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Moderator's Script

I. WELCOME

Welcome and thank you for participating in this study! My name is Adria Goldman and I am one of the researchers for this project as well as the moderator for this focus group session. What we are going to do today is have an open discussion about beauty. I'll ask a few questions just to prompt the dialogue. Next, we'll watch a brief clip of a new television sitcom. After that, we'll finish up our discussion on beauty and I will end by giving you more information about the study along with the contact information of the research team. As noted on your consent form, this session will be audio and video recorded. This is only for the purpose of data collection and it will not be released to anyone outside of the research team. In the report of findings, your name will not be associated with your responses. The recordings will be stored in my office – a secure location that is locked. You will also notice that I have another person operating the camera. She is here so that I may actively participate in the discussion with you all. She understands that all information discussed is confidential and she has assured me that she will not share our conversation with anyone upon completion of this session. Also, please keep in mind that there isn't any right or wrong answer to these questions. So please feel free to share your views and opinions.

II. CONFIDENTIALITY AND RESPECT

Our goal today is to have an open discussion about beauty. I can assure you that your responses, views, and opinions will not affect the credit you receive for participating in this study as well as your standing in any of your courses. None of your information will be released to anyone outside of the research team. I must also ask you to abide by this same level of confidentiality and not share any information discussed during this session with anyone. I also must ask everyone to keep an open mind during this discussion and respect every individual as well as their views and opinions.

III. COURSE CREDIT

Since you have all signed up through the Communication Department's Research Participation Pool, you will be given credit based on the agreement between you and your instructor. If you feel at some point that you are not comfortable with participating, you are free to leave and will still receive credit. Are there any questions?

IV. PRE-MEDIA QUESTIONS (See Appendix B)

V. TRANSITION TO MEDIA CLIP

Alright – thank you for your discussion. I appreciate your participation and responses thus far. Now, we will view a brief clip of a television sitcom aired on ABC called "*Ugly Betty*".

VI. POST-MEDIA QUESTIONS (See Appendix B)

VII. CLOSING

Thank you so much for attending this focus group session. We've had a great discussion about beauty and your participation is greatly appreciated. Here is a debriefing sheet (See Appendix B) that gives you more information about the study—this includes its purpose and contact information for all of the researchers involved. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either one of us. Thanks again!

Focus Group Questions

PRE-STIMULUS QUESTIONS

1. Please tell me your name, major, and year.

2. How do you define or describe physical beauty for women?

3. What do you think influences your idea of beauty for women?

4. What influence do you think the media (for example: TV, movies, advertisements) plays in shaping society's view of beauty for women? And if so, in what ways? Do you believe that the mass media influence your definition of beauty? If so, in what ways?

5. How do you evaluate these types of beauty standards for females?

6. Is beauty important for different types of success in society? Career? Happiness? Popularity? Romantic relationships? Why?

7. Is beauty important for you in order to be successful in different areas? Career? Happy? Popular? Romantic relationships? Why?

8. Are there any other thoughts or feelings you would like to express about physical beauty for women.

POST-STIMULUS QUESTIONS

1. Have any of you seen this television sitcom before?

2. Now that we've watched this brief scene from *Ugly Betty*, I'd like to ask you again, how do you define or describe physical beauty for women?

3. Based on the brief scene we just watched from *Ugly Betty,* I want to ask you again to consider the influence of the mass media. Do you think this TV show and other media

play a role in shaping society's view of beauty for women? And if so, in what ways? Do you believe that this TV show influences your definition of beauty? If so, in what ways?

4. Considering the discussion we just had about *Ugly Betty* and the media, I'd like to ask you again, how do you evaluate these types of beauty standards for females?

5. Based on the many standards of physical beauty for women that we've discussed, tell me what you think about these two characters. Please describe and evaluate these two characters in relationship to the standards of physical beauty for women.

6. Is beauty important for different types of success in society? Career? Happiness? Popularity? Romantic relationships? Why? Now let's think about the two characters. Considering these two characters, would they be successful in their career, happiness, popularity, romantic relationships?

7. I'd like to ask you again to consider if beauty is important for you in order to be successful in different areas? Career? Happy? Popular? Romantic relationships? Why?

8. I appreciate all of this discussion about beauty and physical attractiveness. Yet again, I'd like to know if there are any other thoughts or feelings you would like to express about physical beauty for women.

Debriefing Statement

Thank you so much for participating in this study!

In this study we are investigating the effect beauty images in the television sitcom *Ugly Betty* have on female audience members framing, or perceptions, of beauty. The findings of this study will help us understand more about the role the media plays in defining beauty standards for young women.

Each session was audio and video taped only for the purpose of proper data collection. The recordings will only be accessible to members of the research team and will be destroyed upon completion of the research project.

Findings from this study will be presented in the Master's Thesis of the moderator and researcher (Adria Goldman). Participants will not be identified by name and will only be referenced in the findings by a pre-determined code number.

We also request that you keep all information discussed in this focus group session confidential – including the names, views, and opinions of the participants involved.

If you have any further questions about this study or would like to learn about the findings (at the end of the year), please feel free to contact a member of the research team:

Dr. Andrew Paul Williams, lead investigator (apwill04@vt.edu)

Adria Goldman (agoldman@vt.edu)

Focus Group Transcription A

Session #1 - Tuesday, November 4, 2008 – Start time approx. 3:00 p.m.
Duration of Session - 1:01:21

Moderator: Welcome and thank you for participating in this study! My name is Adria Goldman and I am one of the researchers for this project as well as the moderator for this focus group session. What we are going to do today is have an open discussion about beauty. I'll ask a few questions just to prompt the dialogue. Next, we'll watch a brief clip of a new television sitcom. After that, we'll finish up our discussion on beauty and I will end by giving you more information about the study along with the contact information of the research team. As noted on your consent form, this session will be audio and video recorded. This is only for the purpose of data collection and it will not be released to anyone outside of the research team. In the report of findings, you're name will not be associated with your responses. The recordings will be stored in my office – a secure location that is locked. You will also notice that I have another person operating the camera. This is Erin. She is here so that I may actively participate in the discussion with you all. She understands that all information discussed is confidential and she has assured me that she will not share our conversation with anyone upon completion of this session. Also, please keep in mind that there isn't any right or wrong answer to these questions. So please feel free to share your views and opinions. Our goal today is to have an open discussion about beauty. I can assure you that your responses, views, and opinions will not affect the credit you receive for participating in this study as well as your standing in any of your courses. None of your information will be released to anyone outside of the research team. I must also ask you to abide by this same level of confidentiality and not share any information discussed during this session with anyone. I also must ask everyone to keep an open mind during this discussion and respect every individual as well as their views and opinions. Since you have all signed up through the Communication Department's Research Participation Pool, you will be given credit based on the agreement between you and your instructor. If you feel at some point that you are not comfortable with participating, you are free to leave and will still receive credit. Are there any questions before we begin? Alright, my computer is doing a little crazy thing so if you see me fooling with that I'm just trying to get the video clip ready. But we're going to go ahead and start.

Moderator: First what I want to do is just go around an introduce ourselves – give our name and major. I'm going to introduce myself as well and I'm going to ask Erin to do the same. I'll start. Like I said, I'm Adria Goldman. I'm a second year Master's student and I'm doing this research for my masters thesis. I'll explain the topic in further detail later as we finish. And that's me. I'm in Communication and I'm focusing in on Media studies. So Erin, if you want to introduce yourself?

I'm Erin Cooper. I'm a first year graduate student and I'm also in Communication, studying Public Relations.

Moderator: Okay, you want to start over here? (*NOTE: Names of female participants have been changed in order to maintain confidentiality*).

I'm Rose. I'm a sophomore and I'm a Public Relations major.

I'm Lily. I'm a senior double major in Communication and English.

I'm Judy. I'm a sophomore and I'm a HNFE major.

I'm Macy. I'm a sophomore and I just applied as a Communication major.

I'm Brooke. I am a Comm. major and Bio major.

I'm Morgan and I'm a Political Science and Communication major.

I'm Janet. I'm a sophomore and I'm a HNFE major.

I'm Judy. I'm a sophomore and I'm changing my major to Communication.

I'm Laura. I am a junior and a HTM major.

I'm Whitney. I'm a sophomore and I'm a Communication major.

I'm Jasmine. I'm a sophomore and I'm a Spanish and Comm. major.

I'm Yolanda. I'm a senior year and I'm Comm. major.

I'm Beatrice. I'm a senior Marketing major.

Moderator: Alright, thank you ladies. I've put paper and a pen in front of you. If you have any comments that you want to write down throughout the session that maybe you don't' feel comfortable saying or if there are things that you think about when we're going through the clip. Just for you to write notes if you need to remember something and then just for me to read when I go back through them. Like I said, you will not be labeled my name in any of the findings. Are there any questions before we begin? Can we get started? After I ask the questions, feel free to just jump in with your answers. No need to raise your hand or anything. So the first question I want to ask is how do you define beauty for women? How do you define that? What is beauty for women?

Janet: I think it's more of a confidence thing.

Judy: Being comfortable with how you feel and how you present yourself. Like your style and how you perceive the world so you can influence other people.

Moderator: Okay. Anything else? How would you define beauty for someone? Aside from that, everyone else, how would you define beauty?

Rose: I mean someone can be beautiful on this inside and outside. Like outside physical beauty like how they appear and how well they take care of themselves. And then the inside beauty, like how they act as a person and their moral values.

Brooke; I mean, I don't now if I sound really like vain. But when I hear the word beauty I think of like predominantly outward beauty.

Moderator: Alright, so, let's pull that out. What is outward beauty? And anyone can help to answer that.

Macy: Good skin.

Laura: Probably attractiveness to the others – like to men.

Moderator: So attractiveness to the other sex?

Laura: Yes.

Moderator: Alright, what else?

Alicia: Meeting the standards put forth by the media, like what you see on television and in magazines

Beatrice: Being the appropriate weight for your body type – like not being to thin.

Jasmine: Also, knowing how to dress for your body type.

Moderator: So with knowing how to dress is it tight clothes that are attractive or does it only depend on the body style? Or is it more universal?

Jasmine: I think it all depends on the body style.

Macy: Also on the time and the season. Like what's in style. Fashion of the month and stuff.

Brooke: And some people look really pretty even if they don't have like the in style clothes. Just like their own style.

Judy: Yeah, like your own style.

Brooke: Your own style. I don't think you necessarily have to wear the right clothes to still look good.

Judy: You portray your personal, maybe not beliefs or feelings, but just your individuality.

Lily: And that brings back in the confidence.

Moderator: So individuality and this uniqueness makes beauty for different people? Is that what you're saying?

Head nods communicating "yes"

Moderator: Anything else to add about defining beauty?

Yolanda: It's kind of in the eye of the beholder. I mean I know it's a cliché, but..

Moderator: So it's different for different people

Yolanda: Yeah.

Rose: I think everyone has a different concept of what is beautiful and what's not. Like to some people some people blonde hair and blue eyes is the way to go. For others it's brunette. Or bigger boobs, bigger butt, thinner waist. It just depends on the person.

Moderator: Is there a universal standard? I know you said it's in the eye of the beholder. But are there any universal standards?

Jasmine: I don't think so.

Judy: No, I don't think so.

Lily: I think there are always going to be some qualities that are deemed more attractive. Like, you know thinner as opposed to fatter or something. Or maybe taller as opposed to shorter. I mean, it really depends. I mean there are some things that everyone is going to traditionally say.

Janet: But then in some countries, its very cultural. Like in the Asian countries, the paler you are the more attractive you are. Well, over hear, the tanner you are…

Multiple Participants: Yeah *(Laughter)*

Janet: …the hotter you are.

Judy: I read in a Women Studies class last semester, like, being tan kind of portrays the fact that you have the time to like go on vacation and be able to do those things. Where you're pale, you don't. So it kind of like, I don't know, boost your standards. I don't know if I'm saying this correctly. But like being tan shows that you have time and money to do things along those lines.

Moderator: Okay. Anything else? Alright, how do you define ugliness for women? Describe ugliness for me.

Janet: Dirty.

(Laughter)

Jasmine: Unpleasing to look at.

Yolanda: Not taking care of yourself

Macy: Really bad attitude kind if shows too.

Brooke: Bad teeth.

(Laughter)

Alicia: I think the attitude though. Because I know people who, when we first meet them they're really pretty and your just like "wow". And then you talk to them and then at the end of it you're like "oh my gosh, they're not that pretty anymore".

Moderator: I want to go back to where someone mentioned "not pleasing to look at". What features match that? What features would you consider as not pleasing to look at? Like, in terms of the physical characteristics.

Judy: Bad skin

Moderator: Bad skin. And I know someone mentioned bad teeth.

Rose: Overweight. Or underweight.

Laura: Or even like deformities. Like physical deformities that people may have on their face or their bodies that would make them stand out.

Yolanda: Bad hair.

Brooke: Bad skin – I don't know if someone said that.

Judy: Yeah, she said that.

Macy: Disproportional features. Like there's those studies that have like your hand is supposed to be the size of your face and its supposed match up on different things. And it's like aesthetically pleasing to the eye.

Judy: Yeah, like your like even on left and right. Symmetry.

Moderator: So is there a universal standard for ugliness?

Jasmine: More so that pretty. But I don't know if there is a universal standard.

Beatrice: Like someone said earlier, there are always going to be things that people deem as being unattractive.

Moderator: Okay. Anything else you all want to add about ugliness? So what do you think influences your ideas of beauty and ugliness for women? Your personal ideas of definitions.

Rose: I think the media will definitely shape people's definitions. You open a magazine and you see what to wear and what not to wear. Like how to put your make up on and how to do your hair and what not to do. There are a lot of celebrity comparisons in magazines that's like "she looks good, she looks bad" and that kind of shapes our viewpoints.

Judy: The best and worst dresses some of them are different than others but, I mean.

Brooke: I also, I took a race class and gender class last semester. And we talked about, obviously, the inequalities of women in the media. About how in every magazine you open, models are marketing everything most girls would want. Designer things. Even though its not going to be easy to pay for. But say you look and think, wow they look so pretty and thin so I feel like that's why women strive to be thin. But that's all about marketing.

Beatrice: I also think it depends on the social environment you put yourself into. Like, if your friends don't care about doing their hair and make up all the time then you're probably not going to care either.

Jasmine: It's also like how you grew up in your family. Like if your mom taught you how to or if your older sisters took you shopping with her or told you what to wear or how to do your paper whereas if you're in a family that doesn't really care, then you learn not to care.

Lily: I also think its interesting how when girls go out like on the weekend or whatever, the thing you kind of think of is how to dress to impress guys. But really I think that girls dress up in order to impress other girls a lot of the time.

Multiple Participants: True

Lily: Yeah, because that don't, I mean most of the time guys really don't care that much. As long as you –

Judy: It's like she looks nice, and she looks nice, and she looks nice.

Macy: Guys don't care if you dress in something from Wal-Mart or from like Fifth Avenue.

Judy: It's not going to really make a difference.

Brooke: Girls judge way more than any other people. Like I'm sure everyone in here like checked everyone out right when they got here.

Laughing

Moderator: So, in terms of influence – girls influence each other, like their expectations? Is that what you're saying?

Multiple Participants: Yes

Moderator: Any other influences?

Judy: I think your interests. Like if you, wait what was the original question again? What influences?

Moderator: What do you think influences your idea of beauty and ugliness?

Judy: Yeah, it's kind of like of what your interested in. Like, I'm interested in sports so I can see somebody being like – like my parents sometimes don't even recognize girls from like a volleyball court and when they see them when they come over to hang out or if their going out they don't even recognize them sometimes. Their like, "oh, that's [female's name]". So it's like, I think being able to have a background behind the face.

Moderator: Now do all things that you all named influence beauty and ugly or just beauty? Or is it both?

Macy: I think both.

Multiple Participants: Both.

Macy: Because like if you're watching TV or something and you see someone who's supposed to be ugly and you look like them, you'll feel pretty bad.

Laughter.

Brooke: Try harder.

Laughter.

Moderator: Anything other things you want to add? Okay, are these influences the same for other women? Is this for all women or just for you? Would you say that other women are influenced differently or by different things? Or would you say it's about the same?

Lily: I think it's like what someone said earlier. It depends on where you grew up and how you grew up. Like where you are now.

Beatrice: I think like in the American culture these things are pretty universal. But maybe in like India or wherever else are pretty different and influenced by religion and whatever else.

Lily: And I think that it also can just be like where you from. Like comparatively here, if you grew up in a high school that was maybe – like, I know I grew up in somewhere that was more

rural and we didn't have a lot of shopping compared to someone who grew up in Northern Virginia might. So I don't, like there isn't like a Nordstrom's or anything like that so maybe my perceptions would change after I was around people that had it different from me.

Yolanda: I think the show *What Not to Wear* is a great example because, I mean I'm addicted to it. It comes on Noon and 1 everyday and I watch it. And they kind of tell, Stacy and Clinton say you should look this way, your hair and stuff should look this way. But those people probably didn't think they were that bad off before they even got on the show and then they realize later so I think the media has a huge effect on how I perceive beauty and stuff.

Moderator: Okay, I'm going to take the comment about media, I know somebody mentioned that earlier, and go into my next question. What influence do you think different mediums have on shaping society's views of beauty and ugliness? Television, advertisements, I know someone mentioned models, is it soap operas, reality TV – what ways does it influence.

Rose: I think its kind of a problem because f you look at magazines, models typically seem to be stick thin and then girls get this false impression that to be pretty or beautiful you have to be a stick figure and that's just completing unrealistic to have to starve yourself to achieve that beauty. So I think that its kind of a problem that they don't have models that are average weight instead of just looking anorexic or bulimic.

Jasmine: I think like the advertisements a lot like most models are very, very tall. Like with Victoria Secrets, when you re order it's for women 5'4 and over. If I buy that stuff it's not going to look the same on me.

Laura: ABC used to have a show called *Extreme Makeover* and they take ugly people who have messed up teeth or really bad hair or really bad skin and bad ears and make them beautiful. So I think people will look at the show and say well that person is really ugly and they need to be really pretty to be accepted in society. I think they actually took the show off the air.

Brooke: And it's unrealistic because it's a TV show. It's like *The Swan* show, I think they took that off. And it's because no, not a normal person is going to be like "hey I'm going to spend 200 grand to get, re-do my whole self or a physical trainer to lose weight".

Beatrice: I think in TV and print media there's like this whole airbrushing thing going on – a lot of people don't know about that so they think, oh my gosh this person has no flaws or whatever and really their all airbrushed. So anything that's not like reality TV type stuff they airbrush it all so its kind of like creating a standard that's not possible at all.

Janet: And didn't they just release like a year ago that the average woman was like 5'4 and 130 pounds or something like that.

Brooke: One hundred and like forty.

Janet: Yeah, it was something like, yeah. Definitely not what the media perceives as the \\average women.

Brooke: And you learn in like Dove, like Dove we learned about in marketing about how like Dove went huge like two years ago and they came out with like the average woman it was like people with freckles all over their body or someone who is overweight but it was like real and it was like it made a huge impact on women.

Moderator: Anything else?

Alicia: I don't know. I feel like some companies are trying to make a better effort to like show that the standard of beauty isn't like what TV shows sow you. Like what you said and Secret deodorant does something about not falling into like these false conceptions about what you should look like.

Moderator: Do these media images have a strong influence on your beauty standards? Yours personally – not anyone else's.

Beatrice: Yeah.

Moderator: How so?

Beatrice: I mean you can't look at something and be like, I wish I look like that. It's hard not to.

Moderator: Anybody else?

Macy: It gives you like ideas too. Like you might think you're pretty but there may be like a new style

Judy: Like, do you hair this way.

Macy: Yeah, or like a new way to do something. And you're like, oh that could be cool. And that influences you and you spend more and more time focusing on that.

Moderator: Anybody else?

Rose: I put this idea in my head that I know the people in magazines and on TV its not them in real life and that they probably have pounds on makeup on. And they probably airbrush all type of features. So when I look at that I think, "oh their probably not like that in real life so I don't have to be".

Morgan: I feel like me maybe like it doesn't directly affect me but it probably directs everyone because even if I don't look at them and like oh that's cool but then I see like people walking around and eventually like trends catch on and them I'm like oh well maybe I should try that. So like indirectly it's like always going to affect somebody.

Moderator: Okay, speaking of that indirect effect, how does it affect other people aside from yourself? Does it affect a certain group more or less?

Judy: Different advertisements geared towards different people. Like in the magazines that have like twenties, thirties, forties and fifty, I don't really know. So its like it can affect different people in different amounts. And I guess like as you get older you realize that it's unrealistic to be for everyone to be like 5'10 and 120 pounds. So maybe it doesn't affect older women as much but, so do to be oh try applying your makeup this way and it will heighten goals. So it depends on the advertising.

Yolanda: I think our age is the most affected by it. Cause I still feel like a lot of people in our age range trying to find themselves and figure out what their style is and things like that and what hairstyle they may want to have the next fifty years in their life.

Moderator: So when you say our age range, what would you call that range?

Yolanda: Like 18 to 22.

Macy: And I think what you're saying is right because also like guys our age don't get that their airbrushed. And they don't get that. Like on the Hills. I love that show I'm addicted. But like me and my boyfriend were watching and he doesn't get that they have a makeup stylist and a hair stylist and a fashion person who's like dressing them before each scene and doing their makeup all the time. They don't look like that all the time. People look at the other people on the show who are just standing and stuff. They're not done up.

Beatrice: I don't think, sorry –

Macy: Yeah, like, yeah, its professionals who do that.

Beatrice: I don't think guys are nearly as affected as girls are. Like I think must of them don't care that much about it.

Janet: I think they try to pretend like they don't care.

Jasmine: I agree with that.

Multiple Participants: Oh yeah.

Janet: But I think –

Beatrice: The guys I know really don't care

Laughter.

Morgan: I think girls are more affected but I think when you ask guys, like the girls on TV that's not what they find attractive. Like I feel like guys actually like natural looking girls.

Brooke: Yeah.

Morgan: I mean, obviously.

Rose: I think guys are more concerned with body features and style. I don't think they really care what you wear. They just care that you can fill your bra and your jeans. And that you're not, like you have a figure that is proportional to yourself. I don't think that if you have a good figure and you throw on whatever clothes you what then that's attractive to them.

Moderator: Anything else? Alright, how do you judge these types of beauty standards and other standards for women? I know you said that they are unrealistic. Are they fair? Are they longstanding? Are they universal?

Jasmine: I think they're very longstanding. Like to change like what's portrayed on TV like is normal or what is average really is pretty much impossible. Because its what is like accepted and what isn't.

Judy: You can't make, like all the new people coming in the world all be growing to like 5'10 and 120 pounds. You can't change that. But you can change styles. You can change views. So eventually maybe everyone will come around and realize that what the media may change and make it all average people. Like really random. Not just all tall and skinny or made up.

Moderator: What else? How do you judge these standards?

Brooke: I think you judge them pertaining to yourself. Like if your like 5'5 you're like "I can't wait to get really tall heels so I can seem like I'm tall". Where as I am 5'10 and I'm like "dang I have to wear flats again because I'm a giant compared to everyone else". And I don't think the media is ever gonna go away. It's not. It's like how they sell products. So --

Laura: One thing that you said – I'm probably like four inches taller than you and I can't like I have trouble finding clothes at like hip places. I have to always go to specialty shops. So it limits what I can buy and what I can be in fashion with. Because I can't fit into Gap jeans because there high waters on me. So if people get clothes from like *Abercrombie and Fitch* I have to go to some place in Richmond and get one pair that's probably twice the amount as the *Abercrombie and Fitch* jeans.

Brooke: I feel you girl. I've been there.

Laughter.

Moderator: Anything else? I know we mentioned earlier that they were unrealistic. Does everyone agree with that? Does anyone think they are realistic? Are all of these standards unrealistic?

Macy: I don't think that all of them are. I think there's a lot you can do like personal grooming and hygiene and like if you take time to do your hair and make up then you can look prettier than you did before. That's not really that unrealistic.

Rose: A common theme now, I think, in magazines is natural beauty and ummm also just taking care of yourself. Like looking pretty on your own. It used to be real important to be all done up and have like crazy hairstyle and really bright make up. And now there's like all kinds of natural make up you can use to just bring out your natural beauty and that's pretty important.

Yolanda: I still think the models are completely unrealistic though. Like I will never, I don't care if I go to the gym like three hours a day, I will never look like that. I just don't think my body is meant to go like below like 125 pounds. I just don't think its going to happen. And I'm 5 foot. And my boobs way like ten pounds on their own.

Laughter.

Yolanda: I mean so unless those go down I don't know what's going to happen. I think it's so unrealistic. Some people are just biologically not made to have their hip bones sticking out.

Moderator: Alright. So is beauty important for different types of success in society? I'll start first with careers. Is beauty important for success with a career?

Multiple Participants (at once) Depends on what it is/yeah/if you want to be a model.

Laughter.

Lily: I think unfortunately anytime you go for an interview I know there's certain things that people will just right away like just right off the bat first impression even though you wouldn't like to think its that way. More attractive people are more likely to get a job. Just because that like that's just how society thinks sometimes. Or, I mean, maybe it gives you an air of confidence or even gives you something. But its just like going like saying taller people like with guys taller guys are more likely to get a job because they appear in a different light than maybe someone who's shorter. And it's the same thing with girls. Attractive girls are probably more likely to get a job then..

Rose: And also I think that if you take the time to take care of yourself and you come in an you present yourself well for a job and you look like you took a while to prepare and dress well and do your hair and your makeup and what not then the person interviewing you is going to think that you're going to take the time to prepare for your job. You're not lazy, you're organized. Because if a person came in all ragged, they're not wearing nice clothes – they're tie is let down or their shirt is unbuttoned then obviously they don't care much about the job to want it. So appearance, the way you present yourself, is a significant factor in getting a job.

Jasmine: I think in like interviews and stuff. I feel like people in jobs want to surround themselves with like attractive or more so attractive people then like with ugly people.

Beatrice: I think that people who find themselves attractive or like a guy if you're taller, you just have more confidence and that's probably what's helping them in the interview. Because I think

if you're dumb as a rock but you're gorgeous, you're not going to get the job. They can't rely on just that to get a job.

Brooke: I think definitely like jobs are just screwed up in general. I mean like they did that like research project where they had a really pretty girl go in and she got the job and then they did it again with like a really heavy set girl and they just booted her out. And she was the same person, same brain. Just different weight. And I think it's all about, I think it's so sad, but its all about how you look and how you present yourself.

Yolanda: Especially with TV.

Brooke: Especially with a man too. I feel like they're just ugh. They just want that pretty person. I don't know.

Yolanda: We had a news director from a TV station come and talk to us the other day in class and she was just like if you send me a tape and your teeth are messed up and you have a gap in your tooth I'll throw your tape away in a second. Like you have to look good on TV.

Brooke: It depends on the job too, I think.

Yolanda: Yeah.

Brooke: Like if you want to be a reporter. In fashion its all about that.

Moderator: Okay. What about in terms of happiness? Is beauty important for happiness?

Jasmine: Yes. I mean I'm not saying that is right. But I feel that prettier people are probably more accepted in society and like more successful and would be happier than someone who like who got made fun of in like middles school or high school.

Judy: I mean you get more confidence with that and then you're more successful with confidence you can go for that big job and just increase your happiness starting with self confidence and then you feel you look good and you have a lot of confidence and that leads to happiness.

Alicia: I think it really depends on what your priorities are. If your priorities like your beauty then okay yes it would be important for you to be beautiful for you to be happy. But if you're more concerned with like I don't know like doing well at your job assuming you get the job even though you're not beautiful, but like doing well at your job and your priorities aren't on your beauty then I think you can be happy even if you're not as beautiful.

Yolanda: But how often to you hear girls say, I just look like crap today and I'm in a really bad mood.

Lily: But I'm happy.

Yolanda: Yeah.

Lily: Like on a day to day basis some days I take time to wake up early enough and put on maybe nicer clothes or I actually take time to do my makeup or hair or whatever and you're going to generally be in a better mood and feel better about yourself that day than days when you roll out of bed ten minutes late and don't have time to do anything.

Moderator: Anything else you want to add for happiness? Okay, what about popularity?

Brooke: I think that was a middle school and high school thing. I'd hang out with a girl that was busted any day. I don't really care. I mean that sounds mean but I think I'd be just as cool with her. I probably wouldn't sit around and be like so what size clothes do you like where do you want to go shopping because we would be different but like lifestyle ways we'd be the same.

Beatrice: I think personality is more important for popularity usually. Like charismatic people are more popular usually because they're charismatic and charismatic people are generally well liked.

Jasmine: I think that like the term like the meaning of popularity changes as you get older. Like now it's like she said the more charismatic you are more people generally want to be around them.

Moderator: Okay. Anybody else?

Lily: I definitely think its maturity. Like she said in middle school and early high school there's a huge thing about you know being pretty and people who are overweight or maybe have glasses or whatever

Brooke: It's the boobs.

Multiple Participants: Yeah

Laughter.

Brooke: Like in eighth grade, remember. I always was like gosh I'm going to be a loser. Like they never came.

Moderator: Alright. What about romance? Is it important for romance?

Yolanda: Is beauty important for romance?

Moderator: Yes, is beauty important for romance?

Yolanda: I guess it depends on if your partner thinks you're beautiful cause I'm pretty sure my boyfriend wouldn't be dating me if he didn't think I was somewhat attractive. I mean I'm not saying I think I'm really attractive but I guess he thinks I am in some way.

Lily: I think there's a difference between relationships and being attractive to someone, beauty necessarily. Because I mean it could be – unless you have you know a pretty shallow guy then usually their going to be, in a serious relationship, their going to be attracted to something other than what you look like. Hopefully.

Judy: It's got to be something beneath the surface that they like.

Brooke: And that's like the guy you want is someone where you wake up and you look like crap or something and their like ah you look pretty to me. And you're like thank God.

Laughter.

Brooke: You don't want that jerk that's like you need to, you know, do something.

Moderator: Anything else for romance?

Rose: It's important to be comfortable with your body in order to like be on that physical level with your significant other.

Moderator: Anything else? Alright, anything that you all want to add in general that I didn't ask you all about but that you think would be interesting to add about the discussion of beauty and ugliness? Alright, what I want to do now is actually show you all a clip of a television sitcom called *Ugly Betty*.

Laughter

Moderator: I don't know if any of you have ever seen it before. As you can see I've been playing with my laptop. For some reason it doesn't want to work today so just bare with me for a minute. [Video Problems] Alright, can everyone see the screen okay?

****Video Clip*****

Moderator: Have any of you all ever seen *Ugly Betty*? Can I get a show of hands so I can do a better count? (6 hands) Alright, so for those of you who have seen it, what do you think about the show?

Janet: It's cute but not that realistic.

Brooke: It's progressively gotten like that. It's like *Desperate Housewives* which has progressively become more unrealistic.

Moderator: So overtime?

Brooke. Overtime. But, other than that but I think that's pretty much for what she wants to do at least.

Moderator: What about everyone else who has seen it? Is it realistic? Unrealistic?

Alicia: I think it's hard because America Ferrera is really pretty. She's not an ugly person.

Multiple Participants: I know.

Brooke: They make her look like not pretty.

Janet: I also think that someone in her situation would show in two seasons would have gradually started to dress better, taken her braces off, maybe start wearing contacts. Just for the environment she's in, to feel more accepted. Its hard to look past everything that she does.

Judy: Like she's oblivious

Janet: Exactly, and I think that's unrealistic. No one can be that oblivious when their in the situation.

Judy: Plus, you get your braces taken off eventually.

Brooke: I don't know. Have any of you seen that show *Stylista*. Anyone? Come on. No? Okay.

Alicia: Is that that new show?

Brooke: Yeah. And there's like they're trying to be a junior rep for Elle magazine which is obviously one of the highest fashion magazines. And of course there's always one I feel like in every show there's at least one heavy set person. But like compared to the rest of the group she's like extremely heavy. And like she does a montage talking about like how awkward she feels and like she feels like they notice her right off the bat because of her weight. Just like she's different.

Moderator: Okay. For those of you who haven't seen *Ugly Betty*, is there any particular reason? Or you just haven't caught it?

Jasmine: Just haven't caught it.

Moderator: Just haven't caught it – okay? What about the rest of you? Is it the same thing?

Head nods communicating yes.

Moderator: Alright define, describe Betty for me.

Jasmine: Nerdy.

Judy: She's smart.

Brooke: Saves everyone's ass. Butt. Sorry.

Moderator: Based on the clip, describe Betty.

Brooke: Oh.

Jasmine: Eager.

Laura: Not wanting to get no for an answer.

Janet: Maybe thrifty. In terms of clothing options.

Alicia: She doesn't see her difference. She just sees like a poncho but she doesn't see the, well I'm thinking about what her poncho looks like, but the difference between what she's wearing and what the model's wearing.

Moderator: Okay. What else?

Yolanda: She's friendly.

Rose: Persistent.

Jasmine: Outgoing.

Macy: Definitely not shy.

Moderator: Okay, so based on the standards of physical beauty that we talked about, now describe her.

Judy: She's a little rough to look at. Between the clothes, the glasses, the braces

Laura: The eyebrows

Beatrice: The bangs

Brooke: She could have gotten *Invisaligns* for the same price.

Laughter.

Moderator: Okay, so in relationship to the standards of physical beauty that you use yourself, would you define her as being ugly or beautiful?

Yolanda: Ugly.

Judy: I feel like even if she were to go home with what she has in her house and not even make any purchases, she could look probably like ten times better. But I don't think she needs to go by anything.

Lily: It's not like she's naturally ugly. It's the way she's dressed and made up. Which is what you were saying. The actor herself is not ugly.

Alicia: It's making it really hard to like –

Lily: It's the way they present her. Its all the stereotypes of ugly.

Moderator: So her presentation is ugly?

Multiple Participants: Yes (and head nods communication yes)

Moderator: That's what you're saying?

Lily: Yes

Alicia: It's like the *Devil Wears Prada* too. Like just how they were trying to take someone who's really pretty ugly like stereotypes. It's still hard to believe.

Laura: It's weird because if you watch the show you see hr family and her sister is really dressed nicely and attractive and then her sisters son is dressed nicely and attractive and her dads not that ugly. So its just weird that they're putting her in as, not a black sheep of the family but as someone who just doesn't understand what everyone around her does understand in her everyday life.

Moderator: So would the rest of society call her beautiful or ugly?

Multiple Participants: Ugly

Yolanda: Probably ugly. I mean, that's what the show is called.

Moderator: What about media? According to their standards, she is?

Multiple Participants: Ugly

Moderator: What about the other lady in the clip? The lady she was talking to – describe her to me. Just in general. Whatever comes to your mind.

Macy: Snobby.

Beatrice: Skinny. Tall.

Brooke: I was going to say snark.

Judy: Pleasing to the eye.

Yolanda: Good fashion sense.

Lily: I feel like she's kind of the stereotypical woman who's pretty and knows she's pretty. Like acts like she's maybe better than Betty or whatever because clearly she doesn't want to talk to anyone who's different form her.

Judy: She's dismissive

Moderator: Anything else about the young woman sitting beside her? Alright, according to your beauty standards in general, everything that we talked about before, is she beautiful or ugly?

Jasmine: The woman?

Moderator: Yes

Jasmine: She's beautiful.

Multiple Participants: Yeah (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Moderator: What about everyone else?

Brooke; But inward beauty, ugly as in like anything else.

Moderator: So she's beautiful outside and ugly inside?

Brooke: Yeah, like the devil inside

Judy: Like if you see her wow she looks like nice and then like what'd she say like ten words, I'm being generous,

Moderator: So how would the rest of society define her? Would they say she was beautiful?

Judy: Just from looking at her or --

Moderator: In general. Everything.

Brooke: I think most people would agree --

Judy: She looks nice but she's, she's grumpy.

Brooke: You can't do that anymore. That's just unacceptable. Regardless of how pretty you are, you can't do that.

Moderator: And according to media's standards, she's?

Multiple Participants: Pretty

Moderator: Alright, now that we've watched this brief scene from Ugly Betty, I want to ask you again how do you personally define physical beauty. We're going to review a few of the questions from before. So how do you define physical beauty?

Judy: Just physically?

Moderator: The whole "shebang". How do you define beauty in general?

Jasmine: Tall, healthy body weight. So like, taking care of themselves.

Macy: Yeah, well groomed and well kept. You don't to put in a lot of effort. Like you don't have to be completely done up.

Moderator: Okay. What else?

Beatrice: Not rude.

Macy: Yeah, like there smiling when they enter the room. And you can see their personality is nice and friendly.

Judy: A warm fuzzy feeling over a cold harsh attitude looking interest.

Macy: Like someone you'd want to hang out with again.

Moderator: Anything else? Okay, so tell me again how you define ugliness.

Judy: Rudeness. Just being closed off and dismissive.

Alicia: Like we said earlier, visually displeasing.

Moderator: Okay, so what makes them visually displeasing?

Alicia: Un-kept.

Beatrice: Un-proportional features.

Judy: Bad hair.

Brooke: Teeth

Yolanda: Over or underweight

Macy: Basically just not trying at all and not really caring.

Moderator: Anything else?

Judy: Fashion.

Moderator: So what do you mean by --

Judy: Like poor fashion sense.

Moderator: Okay, anything else? So again, what influences women's beauty standards? Their ideas of beauty and ugliness?

Jasmine: Media and themselves.

Judy: Yeah they perceive like the media influences what they see and base themselves off of.

Jasmine: I think their friends and the people they hang out with.

Judy: Lifestyles. Like whether you're in the city like if you grew up in L.A. or maybe you grew up in a smaller area

Brooke: And I think it depends on the amount of money you and your family has a lot. Because I mean like granted you can go to like H&M type places and still look awesome because its like cool clothes that are that expensive. But to buy beauty products, health products to enhance your beauty I think that that can get extremely expensive. And to buy like in clothes your looking at like spending a fortune.

Judy: Cause its consistently changing.

Janet: It's changing so much.

Moderator: Anything else? So are these influences the same for you and other women?

Multiple Participants: Yeah (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Moderator: Alright, so based on the brief scene that we just watched from Ugly Betty I want to ask you again to consider the influence of the mass media. So do you think this TV show and other forms of media play a role in shaping society's views of beauty and ugliness. Using this as an example.

Lily: I definitely think so because I mean with the clip we've just seen, the show is called *Ugly Betty,* like that stereotype clearly was used as like this is a pretty woman and this is a uglier woman so like I think someone said earlier if you think you look like one of the two stereotypes that the show is trying to present your going to perceive yourself as uglier or prettier, I mean.

Whitney: I think that is also showed the like model woman in a really negative way which I think that the media never does.

Judy: Yeah. It's kind of like switch, puts focus on the fact that the media is pretty much ridiculous in how much they focus on tall and skinny so it kind of presents the other side and brings about that point that its very unrealistic for everyone to look exceptionally, exceptionally good like a model that you can see has been airbrushed and…*unclear statement.*

Alicia: I think the media kind of recognizes that a little bit too. Because if you watch like *Dr. 90210* which is like plastic surgery show, they show you cases that are reasonable. But then they also show you people who are trying to achieve some standard that's just like ridiculous. Like

Brooke: Calf implants

Laughter

Alicia: Or just like AB sculpting or just like some ridiculous things that just makes you realize like okay that's a little obsessive and not, I don't know, right.

Brooke: I think that they would be considered abnormal. Like by most people.

Britt: Is that a pun?

Brooke: Calf implants.

Laughter.

Brooke: Oh no, I just remember that it's what I plan on getting next.

Laughter.

Lily: I think there's definitely some shows that almost critique it too. It's like where there are some shows that are going to enforce the stereotypes, there are others that maybe even subtly make you think about it more.

Moderator: Okay. Anything else? Alright so the way in which the media, such as this clip of *Ugly Betty*, the way in which it creates ideas of beauty versus ugliness, how does that influence your personal beauty standards?

Judy: I think it like for me it like emphasizes that fact that its just ummm focus on tall and skinny that you don't have to be tall and skinny to be beautiful. Like it, for me it just like its ridiculous to think that everyone needs to be looking like a model.

Moderator: Anybody else? Do these beauty images influence your own beauty standards? The ones that you use personally?

Yolanda: Yeah. I mean, when I go to the mall and I'm thinking what would Stacey and Clinton say. Alright I can get it then if it looks that good.

Laughter.

Yolanda: I'm not kidding. I actually think about that. I watch that show way too much.

Moderator: Alright, what about for other women. What influences do the media, such as clips like this, have on other women's beauty standards.

Jasmine: I think it just confirms what like most other people already thought. Like this is the more attractive women, this would be unattractive, like physically. But like also like the inside. Like that is like the better person and that is like the not as good person.

Moderator: So its confirmation of beauty standards?

Jasmine: Yeah.

Moderator: Anybody else? So, images like these in *Ugly Betty* and other TV sitcoms or dramas or any type of media image, who is it stronger for? Who are these images, who is the influence stronger for?

Beatrice: Younger women.

Macy: And probably definitely like high school aged girls.

Judy: Yeah anywhere from like 14 to 25. I mean we can all, we can all look at it and be like "oh I was like that" or "I've changed" or "oh that's like a cool hair style". You know, different aspects can relate to people at that age.

Lily: I would say even younger than that.

Jasmine: I would say it's starting to get younger and younger. I mean –

Brooke: Like pre teen

Jasmine: Yeah. Like ten.

Macy: Well like when you hit puberty and stuff, you're all like awkward and you don't know. Like you're growing up too. You're not even a kid anymore. You don't wear the same things. You try and like you get really insecure and there's all these people in school.

Lily: Yeah. I think middle school is a really good example.

Yolanda: Like everyone wants to be Hannah Montana.

Laughter.

Multiple Participants: Right.

Multiple Participants: Yeah.

Moderator: Alright. Anything else about the influence on different age groups of women?

Yolanda: I think it affects men also too though. Because I mean if you look at like *Grey's Anatomy*, let's say. I think everybody, every man on that show, accept for like the chief, is like --

Brooke: The chief is pretty good looking

Yolanda: He's pretty good looking for like 50 or however old he is. But everyone like looks good on that show and like most of the men on *Desperate Housewives* look really good an I mean I guess, sitcoms is like the one exception because sitcoms are, I feel like, always like *According to Jim*, Jim is always really fat and his wife is super skinny. So I guess sitcoms are like one exception. I think there's definitely pressure for guys to like go to the gym and workout.

Jasmine: I agree. I especially think there's like more and more pressure for them.

Macy: I think the show *Sex in the City*, like I just started watching it like last summer. When I first started watching it, I didn't think that any of them were attractive, none of the guys, none of the girls. I didn't think they were like attractive people. Like what you see on TV. But then after watching it, it kind of lets you see their personality. Like when you first meet people and they might not be the most attractive guys and all but you end up liking them because their personality comes through and they're way more attractive.

Jasmine: I think that's very common.

Macy: Yeah, so I think that was kind of cool. The media, I don't know if they meant to do that but like none of them are super skinny. Like all of them are like average people. And the guys like --

Moderator: Anything else? Alright, so considering the discussion that we've had about *Ugly Betty* and about media I'm going to ask you again, how do you judge these beauty standards? Realistic? Unrealistic?

Jasmine: Unrealistic.

Moderator: Unrealistic? What about the beauty standards that you say are being reinforced by this clip of Ugly Betty? Are they realistic? Unrealistic? Is Betty unrealistic?

Jasmine: I think they're kind of the extremes. Like they want to show you the extremes.

Moderator: Okay. Anything else?

Alicia: Yeah, I think there definitely are people who are bad like on the, what's that show? Is it *What Not to Wear*? Like shocking, wow.

Yolanda: I mean they look really good at the end.

Alicia: They save people's lives. *(Joking tone)*

Moderator: Okay. Anything else anybody wants to add? Okay, I'm going to ask you again, is beauty important for different types of success in society? Let's start with careers.

Multiple Participants: Ummm hmmmm

Moderator: Is it important?

Multiple Participants: Yes

Moderator: How so?

Judy: In *Ugly Betty* he like when she stood up he was like okay how can I get her out of here like how can I say like no you're not acceptable for this position just based on your appearance. Like she didn't say anything other than the fact that "I'm Betty". He's like "ugh", like he was speechless until he figured out how to turn her away and from there she was like "no I'm really good for the job you really need to give me a chance" and she went after him.

Moderator: Okay.

Alicia: And that's not just coming from the media. That was in our textbook, our public speaking textbook. It says you need to look nice in order to get a job.

Jasmine: I think you need especially if you're in sales, your business and stuff, people don't want to buy things from like ugly people.

Macy: My friend just graduated and he's a marketing major or business major or something. And he like he had he looks like a mafia hit man but like they made him grow out his hair more and like style it differently so he wouldn't look like so scary, instead of shaving it. Like his company was really we're not going to hire you if you don't do this cause you're not going to sell anything. So, I think it is a really big thing. Like he's an attractive guy. He just looks scary.

Brooke: Right. And I think that in a job you're representing the company that you work for. So there going to have like unrealistic standards of what they want so.

Laura: Well like if a health supply like if a company hired an ugly person they're probably thinking that person won't get a lot of sells because who would believe that someone really ugly would sell beauty supplies.

Macy: I don't think that, like even if you don't have like gorgeous physical features and stuff, you still can like be pretty and still make yourself presentable. Like you can still do your hair and make up and everything and dress nice for the job. And it's not saying that if you're just not an attractive physically person then you won't get it. I mean you just have to show that you're [unclear??].

Moderator: Okay. Anything else? Alright, what about for happiness?

Judy: She seems pretty bubbly and peachy with herself even though she's *Ugly Betty*.

Alicia: But I feel like that had a lot to do with her home environment.

Lily: I think a big thing is acceptance. Like if you're accepted, maybe if you like surround yourself with people who don't care as much or if you just find. The people who are unhappy who are deemed ugly are the people who are outsiders and feel like no one wants to be around them because they're ugly.

[Brooke leaves]

Judy: I think there's also the other side that like people who are really pretty, they can also be really unhappy. Like so it just surrounding yourself with people who don't judge you based on one or two meet and greet sessions or whatever. You surround yourself with people who don't care how you look and they won't take it like I don't know they don't take it personally that you don't dress up for them one time.

Macy: I think that's really true. Like that people who, must people who, like I have a really good friend who's like gorgeous, she's like supermodel she looks like. But she's really not happy. Because she has to try all the time, wear make up all the time.

Judy: Like if she doesn't she feels like people are like

Macy: Yeah, if she doesn't she feels like people are like "oh, she's not pretty today". Like a lot of times the most pretty people have the worst self esteem issues.

Beatrice: I think if you're happy with yourself like inside and outside it makes it a lot easier to be happy, whatever that means for you. If you're happy with that its easier to be happy with your own life.

Moderator: What about for popularity? Is beauty important for that?

Judy: I feel like once you get into the real world there's no such thing as popularity unless you're like a superstar. Like you're like an actress or actor or whatever. There's no popularity. You just expand your group of friends.

Jasmine: I think personality comes in a whole lot more when you get like mature with popularity.

Beatrice: I think there is popularity in the real world like at my internship there's definitely a such thing as popularity. I mean one of the executives people love and one of them they didn't love. And he was more popular than her, so I mean I don't think that beauty --

Judy: Was there a reason? Was one of them like --

Beatrice: He was really charismatic, he had a great personality. They both did their job well and they both did a lot for the company but one was more popular than the other one.

Judy: It could have been because of social skills, possibly.

Beatrice: I don't think it has anything to do with beauty though.

Moderator: So it exists, but not for beauty?

Beatrice: Yeah.

Moderator: Okay, what about for romance. Is beauty important for romantic relationships?

Jasmine: I think yes and no. I learned in some class that people usually are attracted to people of their same like physical like their same physical status. So if you like, if two ugly people fall in love then their happy. Whereas like there are different degrees of it.

Beatrice: That doesn't always happen. Like its true for most things but my boyfriend and I are completely opposite and like we're attracted to each other. But I think it's just that if you, its beauty's in the eye of the beholder. As long as you think their attractive and they you're attractive, it's whatever works for you guys.

Moderator: Alright, anything else you all want to add? Alright, well thank you so much for attending this focus group session. We've had a great discussion about beauty and your participation is greatly appreciated. I'm going to hand you all a debriefing sheet that gives you my information, more information about the research. Also, on the sticky note, if you could just write your name, your ethnicity, and then your age and make sure you leave the signed copy of your consent form with me. And thank you again ladies, especially considering our technical difficulties. Thank you for being patient with us.

Judy: You said name, age, and ethnicity?

Moderator: Yes ma'am. And then you ladies are free to go.

Session #2 – Wednesday, November 5, 2008 – Start time approx. 11:00 a.m.
Duration of study - 1:01:10

Moderator: Welcome and thank you for participating in this study! My name is Adria Goldman and I am one of the researchers for this project as well as the moderator for this focus group session. What we are going to do today is have an open discussion about beauty. I'll ask a few questions just to prompt the dialogue. Next, we'll watch a brief clip of a new television sitcom. After that, we'll finish up our discussion on beauty and I will end by giving you more information about the study along with the contact information of the research team. As noted on your consent form, this session will be audio and video recorded. This is only for the purpose of data collection and it will not be released to anyone outside of the research team. In the report of findings, you're name will not be associated with your responses. The recordings will be stored in my office – a secure location that is locked. You will also notice that I have another person operating the camera. This is Roxana. She is here so that I may actively participate in the discussion with you all. She understands that all information discussed is confidential and she has assured me that she will not share our conversation with anyone upon completion of this session. Also, please keep in mind that there isn't any right or wrong answer to these questions. So please feel free to share your views and opinions. Our goal today is to have an open discussion about beauty. I can assure you that your responses, views, and opinions will not affect the credit you receive for participating in this study as well as your standing in any of your courses. None of your information will be released to anyone outside of the research team. I must also ask you to abide by this same level of confidentiality and not share any information discussed during this session with anyone. I also must ask everyone to keep an open mind during this discussion and respect every individual as well as their views and opinions. Since you have all signed up through the Communication Department's Research Participation Pool, you will be given credit based on the agreement between you and your instructor. If you feel at some point that you are not comfortable with participating, you are free to leave and will still receive credit. Are there any questions? And we'll do a sign up sheet at the end so that's how you'll get your credit from each instructor. Are we ready to begin? Alright first I want us to just go around and introduce ourselves. Give your name, your major, and your year. I'm going to introduce myself as well and I'm going to ask Roxana to introduce herself as well. Like I said, my name is Adria Goldman and I am a second year graduate student here at Tech. I'm in the Communication department and I'm actually doing this for my thesis so I appreciate the help. Roxana?

Camera Operator: I'm Roxanna Morasiceu. I am a second year graduate student in the Department of Communication. I come from Romania and I want to get specialized in Public Relations.

Moderator: And if we can start on this side of the table. (*NOTE: Names of female participants have been changed in order to maintain confidentiality*).

Zara: Should I say my first and last name?

Moderator: If you'd like. Whatever makes you comfortable.

Zara: I'm Zara. I'm a senior HNFE major.

Nadia: I'm Amy. I'm a sophomore HNFE major.

Cayla: I'm Cayla and I'm a freshman Marketing and Management major.

Ashley: Hi I'm Ashley and I'm a sophomore Communication major.

Tiffany: I'm Kerry and I'm a junior Communication major.

Tonya: I'm Kelsey and I'm a Communication and Interdisciplinary Studies major.

Carol: I'm Carol and I'm a Comm. major and I'm a sophomore.

Monique: Hi everyone, I'm Monique. I'm a sophomore and I'm a double major in Political Science and Communication.

Amy: My name is Amy and I am a senior Broadcast Journalism major.

Lisa: Hi my name is Lisa and I'm a Communication ITS major and I'm a senior.

Jessie: Hi I'm Jessie and I'm double majored in Communication and Human Development and I'm a sophomore.

Tori: I'm Teresa and I'm a junior and I'm a Communication and Speech major.

Moderator: Alright ladies, we'll jump right into our questions. Alright first I want to ask you all, and feel free to just jump in. You don't have to raise your hand, this is really an open discussion. How do you define beauty for women? How do you describe it? What is beauty for women?

Lisa: Ummm, ok. I think its part of the way they carry themselves. The way ummm their attitude. And then also, physically like I think its like what you find appealing. But I mean like everyone has different taste. Like what I think is beautiful might not be what you think. So its kind of like based on your own perception or where you come from.

Moderator: What else?

Amy: I also think confidence is a big part of beauty because you can have a beautiful person that doesn't have any confidence therefore most people don't see that because their hiding but when they have confidence their willing to show and meet.

Moderator: ok

Monique: I kind of think at the same time with confidence like some people are like cocky or like you know they carry themselves with too much strut and they think their too classy for

people. And I just think that's a turn off for a lot of people. I think even for like guys. When they see women like that.

Moderator: Ok. Anybody else?

Zara: In terms of physical beauty I don't think its beautiful to be like stick thin. I mean women were made to have curves and I mean if you're born that way that's one thing but if you try and make yourself that way I don't think that's beautiful.

Moderator: Ok. Anybody else?

Ashley: I think people can end up coming like over done if over processed, like so many beauty products and things. Too much make up, too much tanning, too much hair dye can detract from someone's natural beauty.

Amy: I think a lot of women you see who get like plastic surgery and stuff and like they might have naturally been like gorgeous but then they go through so much plastic that they no longer look like they originally did and then they just look like this just Barbie doll. It's just like Meg Ryan I thought when she first started was just beautiful and then she got lips done and other things and she she's still pretty but at the same time she was gorgeous I mean when she first started out. And, you know, through plastic surgery, through different things – she kind of lost her original look.

Jessie: Along those same lines too, there are girls who are like still in college like you see them at the gym and like they have full make up on and they can't even like leave their dorm room without putting on makeup. Like if anyone like a male lives in your dorm they freak out. So, it's a lot of pressure.

Elizabeth: Also with like plastic surgery and stuff you lose your uniqueness when you get plastic surgery. Because then like everyone looks the same. Part of beauty is kind of like unique being and having something no one else has.

Nadia: Yeah, like if you look at models and stuff none of them are like the typical girl next door. They all have something unique about them and if they got surgery or something to change that then they wouldn't be seen in the same way that they are now so.

Moderator: Anything else?

Lisa: I don't think like plastic surgery is necessarily like a bad thing I think when you overdo it and it's too much, it's a bad thing but like I don't know. I just think there's like a fine line.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Moderator: Any other comments? Ok. Alright, how do you describe or define ugliness for women? What makes a woman ugly?

Amy: Attitude. I think when a girl, like she said, the cockiness thing. I mean that's huge I mean if a girl, doesn't matter what she looks like, if a girl is to much into herself or something like that your just like that's like not cute.

Monique: If you don't carry yourself well, like if you kind of, it's kind of like people are going to treat you the way you treat kind of yourself or the way you look at yourself. And but its like if you kind of have like that bitchy attitude you know people are going to act bitchy towards you at that same time. Or like you know if you set yourself up for like every guy coming at you, you know buying you a drink or you're going home with them. Well that's the kind of respect you're going to get. I kind of think that's very unattractive because at the end of the day their just gonna be like alright it's whatever.

Moderator: Any other comments?

Jessie: I think you're ugly too if you don't have any substance to you. Like you know there's a lot of girls that feel like will you know look very gorgeous all day along and make sure their constantly like checking their appearance but they don't do anything fulfilling with their day. They don't, you know make sure they help someone or do something that like stimulates themselves. And I don't think that's attractive either.

Ashley: Physically I don't I don't think I ever go through my day and look at someone and think "oh their ugly".

Monique: Yeah.

Ashley: I can't think of something physically that I would categorize as like ugly or something.

Monique: Any specific characteristics that's ugly, but not

Ashley: Yeah.

Moderator: Any other comments? Alright, what do you think influences your personal ideas of beauty and ugliness?

Jessie: Other girls.

Carol: The media.

Ashley: Definitely from my family, my mom and my sister. I have older sisters so, you know that influences.

Lisa: I think like your guy friends or boys you spend a lot of time with and their like oh she's hot and your like you know you pay attention to what boys around you like. So you're like oh should I look like that.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Ashley: That's true. Every time guys make like some little comment about what they think are attractive whether its like a look or behavior. Even if you don't take it to heart, you remember it.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Monique: Yeah, like my boyfriend does that all the time. Like I'll do that to I'll be like, "oh my gosh he's so cute". Its like he'll see a girl and be like "oh my God she looks so hot" and its like "did you have to add 'so' hot"

Moderator: Alright. Any other influences?

Zara: I was going to say like with guys, like my older brother will surprise me because we're like really close and he'll be like oh that's so unattractive and I'm like "really, you think that's unattractive. I would never have guessed". And so it sort of makes you realize that guys, that the things you think men would like, they don't always think are beautiful or attractive or anything like that.

Jessie: I feel like a lot of times like on the same floor like girls dress for girls like more than they dress for girls anyways because it's like a lot of times boys don't want to see you in stilettos this high with jeans painted on. Like they like a little more class to it and I feel like a lot of times girls are trying to be like trendy.

Moderator: Now are these influences the same for you and other women? Are these just influences on yourselves? Or do you think these are influences on all women in society? Or do you think there are different influences or additional influences?

Carol: I think your culture has a lot to do with it because its like if like somebody from like a different culture, they think their family pushes different like ideas of beauty onto them and then like someone from my culture might think that like my hair is pretty but someone from her culture or her culture might be like "why is her hair long and brown. It should be like platinum blonde or something and we don't think that's pretty".

Moderator: Other comments?

Monique: I have to agree with her because like my family is Indian and so like I was like the first person who was born and raised in America so for my family because of the climate change and what not like I'm, sorry, but like the fattest person in my family at my age. Like my grandma was like 80 pounds when she got married, granted she was like 4'10, 4'11, but like my mom, she was like the same way when she got married and she was only like 87 pounds when she got married. And she was like 25 and like I'm about a good 130 chilling, you know. (*Laughter*) And so it definitely, they definitely push me because like they push it like my brother who's twelve, and he's born and raised here and he's really skinny naturally. He's just like "you're fat" and I'm like "you're twelve, what do you know".

(*Laughter*)

Moderator: Other comments?

Zara: I mean with culture, that's funny that's how your culture is, its like to be skinny because I'm half Mexican and its like all about the curves and, you know, how sensual women are. And it's just funny how things are so different.

Jessie: I think its by like age group too because when your twelve or thirteen its all about the eyeliner and like the big hoop earrings and like where you're in college your like you try to get by with like as little makeup as I can. And then like as you get older and your more professional like you want to look like your not wearing make up so I think it like depends on how old you are and what your career, wherever you are in life.

Moderator: To go off of your comment about age, does the influence on different women depend on the age? Is the influence different for younger women versus older women. What are the differences?

Amy: I think women are more confident when they get older and their more comfortable in their skin. So when you're a teenager or a preteen or something like that you're just getting introduced to this world and you know looks and attractiveness and being attractive by the opposite sex or whatever and I think your more, your more glued to the television and glued to the media to find out what makes you pretty and you look at pop stars and you know for our generation Brittany Spears had just came out and that was huge. And you had girls who would like to put the pastel makeup just like her and stuff like that. And then as you get older you're more comfortable with who you are and women like I know being in the core there's a lot of males that I'm around and, well the majority of men --

Laughter.

Amy: and, you know, you have to like grow a thick skin in the way. Therefore you feel more comfortable with who you are, you know. When you see these girls, like they were saying, like the guys will comment and they'll comment, they'll contradict each other, they'll completely, so you have to be more confident. And the more you interact with people, the more comfortable you are. That comes with age.

Ashley: I think also just like getting further along in your life, your priorities change. Like I would much rather sleep in then get up and spend time getting ready. But also, you know, you have your interest and you have your goals and you realize trying to impress other people is not necessarily the most important thing to spend your time on. I think that just comes with age and maturity.

Nadia: And when you're younger you're more likely to idealize someone. Like she was saying about Brittany Spears or something like that. Like you'll idealize them and try to be like them. But when you get to be older you get to become more critical of things like that and you're like why would I idealize them. And like you see their flaws more than just seeing how perfect they

are and trying to imitate them so you like become your own person and don't try to be like other people as much as when you were younger.

Jessie: And also I think like age influences, I was a camp counselor this summer and I was with twelve year olds all summer and they make sure that every time they do something they put their make up back on or anything like that. And I think a lot of that is influence from each other but as you get older, like now, the only reason I usually am not wearing my t-shirt and sweatshirt is because I have to go to my job. So I think it like depends on what you're doing in your life that influences the way you feel like you need to look.

Moderator: Alright, I know a few of you mentioned media. What influence does the media have on shaping society's view of beauty and ugly for women? TV, movies, advertisements, which of these mediums specifically influence or shape society's view of beauty and how?

Tonya: I think for me it probably be the tabloids and all the magazines and the way the stories about what celebrities just lost how much weight. Or what they did to, you know, look better. And so it starts to make you think that you need to do something like that.

Tori: Going off of that, just everyone on TV, everyone in magazines is like tan and tall and skinny and beautiful. And has all this make-up and like really expensive clothes so I feel like that also makes a difference.

Jessie: I think its advertising mostly for me because anytime you have any television show or anything its like, "this make up will last sixteen hours and this and that." So I think that like that's constantly being reinforced in your mind, like you go to the store and you're like, "oh yeah, that will last so long. I want that one".

Lisa: I think its like, kind of taking what you guys said further, like the product placement that they have in television shows. Like I know like everyone knows *Sex in the City* and then like the way they put out like different products and like they have like a whole episode like devoted to like a certain vodka. So it's like that's the hot vodka now. And they you have like Jimmy Choos and Blahniks and you're like, "Oh my God, if I had this is like then I the Tiffany and everyone loves Tiffany and Tiffany's all hot". People like kind of relate that to like their status.

Amy: Back to like size and stuff like that being tall, and skinner, and leaner, I think. There's been like a morph, like another change. Like in the 50s, Marilyn Monroe was curvaceous so they actually accentuated that. But then in the 60s Twiggy came out and she was really skinny so a lot of women were trying to be like her. And through that you had these you know gaunt women who were models. But now like you're currently seeing people like Beyonce and J-Lo and their skinny but they also have curves to them. And like Jennifer Hudson came out and she's not like the skinniest girl in the world but she's also gorgeous. And its making that okay for like, they're trying to push more for the healthy look now whereas you had so many eating disorders that they didn't realize what they were causing. The media, and now that since they're trying to push healthier women out there because they kind of caused in a partial way, a lot of these problems with women.

Tonya: I think a lot of it though is fake or pretend because like the host of E News, I was watching it the other day, and they were talking about Eva Longoria putting on weight or something then losing it to get back to the good size like she was ever fat by any means. And then they'll compliment someone for, you know, being curvaceous but then the host is the skinniest person I've ever seen or something. So it's kind of you know, then in the movie *Knocked Up*, they tried to encourage her to lose weight to be on camera. So it kind of, I don't know, it's fake.

Ashley: They're saying one thing but their still like keep showing the same thing.

Tonya: Right, like if they think it's so good to change it, why don't they do it themselves.

Jessie: I feel like with eating disorders and stuff people have tried more and more to say its comfortable to be in your own body, but they feel like that's what they should say. It's exactly what you're saying.

Tonya: Yeah.

Jessie: They think it's necessary to say. But its not necessarily what they're doing. They're saying one thing and doing another.

Zara: I mean, maybe it's just me but I try and take the positives. Like with product placement and with *Sex and the City*. Yeah it's I mean its kind of crazy all the things they promote but at the same time the women of *Sex and the City* were strong women. They made it, like its okay to get pregnant and have a child by yourself. It's okay to be single and fierce and do all these great things and have a wonderful career. And so I try to take those things rather than like Tiffany's really skinny. She actually manages to fit in all these designer clothes. But she works for it herself. And when I see fake people, I mean yeah of course it would look great to look like them. But that's totally not the realistic thing of what beauty actually is. Like, if you look around we all look completely different but we're all just as beautiful as the next person.

Ashley: I think the one thing that always bothers me about the media, or not bothers me, but like you sit there and all these celebrities look fantastic but they also have like a million people getting them to look that way telling them like what to eat and how to exercise and what to put on and how to do this. And you know, if every average person had a full staff like they would look like that.

Monique: My friend who's a freshman here, she is really really pretty. And she's like really short and she weighs barely 100 pounds. And like all she eats is chicken, junk food, and soda. Like, that's her diet. And she doesn't gain or lose a pound at all. And for her, she was just like instead of like telling me what people you know or what I should do or I should eat or how I should look, blah blah blah, I rather just die happy. She's like, "I'm going to die eventually, I might as well die happy". And I kind of agree with her. Because I can't leave without some of that junk food. And I mean, I'm a personal trainer at McComas so I know its kind of hard to like, we're supposed to be a good example but you know there's always that one little like weakness that you have that you can't let go. Its food's kind of like my thing. So I mean I feel like on ads and

stuff when they have like celebrities and they catch them like out while their using the bathroom or not having make up on or like eating a Twix. Like it's like the end of the world. Like get over it. I do it too.

Nadia: Going back to like what she said though, like the not practicing what they preach kind of, I think at the same time it's also us that's affecting it and not just them. Because if they were to practice what they preach, the whole culture is in like has their own ideas and they would like attack them for it. Like we can't get anywhere until everyone else changes. Just them changing doesn't mean that the ideas that other people have are going to change. So like normal people also have to see that its okay before like they can practice what they preach. Because if they get that much criticism like that's not really getting them anywhere so.

Tonya: Yeah, I was going to say that earlier about how like you know they're trying to promote healthiness but at the same time it doesn't help us when they tear other celebrities down for putting on weight or not having make up on and you see like what they really look like or something. So then we feel like we have to live up to some standard.

Tiffany: I feel like there's really no way to escape it because we'll always you know see stuff on TV or flipping through channels or whatever. And at the grocery store you always see the headlines on the tabloids. So I feel like it's always constantly there.

Tonya: And we buy into it though. I mean I know I do. I buy US Weekly every now and then. Its like a guilty pleasure but you know you have to kind of take it with a grain of salt.

Moderator: Now is this media influence, is it stronger for yourself, is it strong for other women, is it stronger for a particular group of women – the media influence on beauty?

Monique: I definitely think, I know that it varies for like age and person to person. But I think age really has a lot to do with it cause like I know like my brother is twelve so like a lot of his female friends around that age too. And you know they come knocking on my door looking for my brother wearing these short little skirts where I see things I'm not supposed to be seeing. And like stuffing training bras, and I'm like "what are you doing". Like it's, I think like the media definitely influences them. Because like now all I really watch are like reality TV shows. You flip channels, that's all there is. Like when I was younger you know we had like TGIF which had like cartoons on it. And had like the dinosaur show on it. It was just like, that's what made me happy, you know. And now it's like even if I watch Nickelodeon or something, there's like Brittany Spears' sister, you know, who's knocked up now.

Laughter.

Monique: And I definitely think that like it definitely like the pre teen age to like I would even say to like the end of high school, because really you might be in a high school as a female you're still really confused about how to carry yourself, how to like you know how to be confident in yourself, what's too much, you know. What kind of guy should like me. Why I shouldn't go chasing after them. Things like that makes them like kind of immature. I definitely think like in college we learn a lot more. Like my freshmen year like people, I definitely saw

girls like running around looking like absolutely dumb, seeking attention. And it reminded me of all those years all over again because like they didn't have that experience to carry themselves with confidence and just being happy with just girls, you know.

Jessie: I think too its lifestyle. Because I like know for some women, like my moms age, she's a nurse, she doesn't, like when she looks at some of her friends who work in like the corporate world, she doesn't care what trends are or what bag their carrying because she goes to work in scrubs everyday. So like that doesn't bother her. If she was to walk in the hospital in certain things like that you know people would, it wouldn't look right in her settings. So I think like as much as it does have to do with different age groups it also has to do with your lifestyle because the media's going to affect different people at different ages.

Lisa: I think, like to go back to the age thing, I think also like your sub-culture in America have a lot to do with it. Because I feel like, certain women look at certain things. Like I feel like, I mean I don't really know how it is for other women, like African American women like you have to have a certain type of body, like you know your butt needs to be a certain size and little waist and other things rappers talk about. So I feel like there's pressure for that. So I think like that's why its not okay for people like Beyonce and J-Lo to be out there. But then like, you put out like white influences and everything is skinny, tall, long hair, blonde hair. So I feel like it just depends on like who your, not just what age you are, but like who it is your tuning into. Like is it BET or like country music, you know like CMT or something like that.

Monique: It definitely has to do with also like your like demographics. Like cause, you know people who live in like New York and California aren't going to live like the same way like in Vermont or Arkansas, you know. And it definitely, like the weather has a lot to do with it and like, because you know nobody is Texas is going to be carrying around, you know, a $1000 fur coat. Because it's not really ever cold there. And so, ummm, I definitely think that has a huge part to do with it. Like you know, in more rural southern locations there going to be more you know conservative, if you will, or you know still going with the whole like stay at home thing or being, you know, very classy, you know. So, not such much professionalism. So I think that has a lot to do with it as well.

Amy: Back to what she was saying about like age groups, I you know, as you, like me, I'm a senior, as I went up each year you always look down to the freshmen class, especially the females. And they would just act certain ways and stuff. It's like the first time they were free and stuff like that. And you would really see, you know, like, again I'm in the core so I'm around guys all the time and they ridicule them you know. And then their like "oh" you know they'll say things like, you know "she's skank but she's easy, hey let's go for that one". And you're sitting here and you're just like "wow, that's harsh". But at the same time, it's true. And ummm, I mean I don't mean to hurt anyone here but like this style of like, a lot of people ridicule the style of wearing a short skirt and then boots and then a sweatshirt. Because I know a lot of people were saying like that's not practical. You know, its cold and you're wearing a short skirt. You're not wearing tights, you're not wearing anything to warm your legs. And then your wearing big boots. You know. And it's a fashion statement. You know. And its cute and its in the media, its in the magazines so its cute and people do it. But then I see a lot of guys are sitting there like, "what is wrong with these girls". You know. And I don't know what to say to them. I'm just like, you

know, I don't know. But, you know, it just it's something that people notice a lot. You know. It's because its fashionable. Its because its cute. But then, is it really practical?

Moderator: Now, how do you all personally judge these beauty standards, beauty and ugliness for women? Are they fair? Are they realistic? Idealistic? Are they one-dimensional? Long standing? How would define them, how do you evaluate them?

Lisa: Like how do you decide if someone's ugly or beautiful?

Moderator: Like the standards that you, the standards that society uses in terms of qualifying someone as beautiful or ugly, are they fair standards? Are they realistic standards?

Monique: Definitely not.

Elizabeth: I feel like they're not realistic, like they always say like you know 5'10, blonde. And it's like I'm 5'2, I'm never going to be 5'10. And I'm okay with that. That's just the way I am. I'm not going to be blonde and I'm okay with me too. So I don't feel like they're realistic but you just have to be comfortable with yourself.

Zara: They're really unrealistic. It's kind of scary. I have a niece who's, she's thirteen this year and just seeing the way that things affect her and the things that she says about what's pretty and what's ugly and about herself. I always try and like cause obviously I'm not home a lot so when ever I go home I try and sit down with her and be like you know "How are you feeling, what's going on" and then when she says things like, I remember when she said she was ugly and I said "you're not ugly". Like you're thirteen and there's all these things that people are going to say to you there are all these things you're going to see, but you have to know, like, I was trying to make sure she knows who she is and she remembers that there's so many different standards and she still has such a long time left to live and so many things to see. And she like shouldn't even think that way. So -

Jessie: I think it's unfair too in comparison to how our society judges men. Like I know men do get some pressure to be fit and be big and yadda yadda, go to the gym. But I think that the pressure we put on men in our society and the pressure we put on women is completely unequal because when I'm at Hokie Grill and the girl next to me is eating a salad and I'm stuffing my face with like three Chic-Fil-A sandwiches, like I know people are judging me. But if a guy does the same thing it's not a big deal. So I think that's unequal.

Ashley: I don't know. I kind of disagree with that. I feel really bad for guys sometimes. Especially like short guys. Like I just I feel like a lot of people like write guys off for their for their looks as much as for girls. I really do feel like there's a lot of really nice guys that get shafted because of their looks just the way a lot of really nice girls do.

Monique: I, my, my boyfriend and his brother are really short. They kind of got the mom's genes. And umm, my boyfriends a little bigger than the brother. He's definitely, the brother's definitely the more model material. He's gotten offers even those he's only 5'2, 5'3. My boyfriend's like 5'7, 5'8. And I mean I definitely think it's the way you carry yourself as a guy.

Because like I remember when I first met him, he really was like the geek out of school that nobody knew of. And like as like he realized like he's alright with what he does. Like he plays soccer, he works out, he does what he has to do. And he has that six pack. He has, you know his muscles, blah blah blah. And I definitely think that, because it's, he changed his own mindset, but I definitely do think that like its as little unequal just because like if there was an obese female and an obese male, I definitely think she would get criticized more. Not only from the girls, but also the guys. Versus with guys, when it comes to guys its like, the guys definitely get it from guys but girls are kind of like, yeah they'll never go out with them but they'll definitely be there friend. Like that little booster, you know. And I feel like guys definitely worry about the type of people or the opposite sex they hang around with because its like, oh well what if somebody thinks I'm going out with her? I don't want that. You know. So –

Moderator: Now, are these beauty standards for women, I know you said they're unrealistic, etc., Are they, are they important for success in careers for women?

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Tonya: I think if you have two people that are applying for the same job and they're both just as equally qualified, they're probably going to go with the more presentable person.

Nadia: I know that at my job, I mean its kind of a joke, but my manager, if someone would come in and ask for and ask for an application or something, and I go back and ask him if I can give one to them. He'd be like, "oh are they hot" and I'd be like, "uh I guess so" and then he'd come out there and be like "oh no they're not attractive". Like I'm not even going to worry about it". And he won't even like consider it because I guess, I don't know. Its just an unreasonable standard for you to be attractive to be like a waitress or something like that.

Jessie: I was going to say, like I work in the restaurant industry back at home and like I work at an Italian restaurant that you need to be dressed up for and you need to wear like black pants and a blouse and everything. If people come in for like an interview or anything in jeans or you know sneakers its not even about like attractive, how attractive they are like physically, but just about the way they present themselves. And so like I think like that whole like thing about a beauty image. Like they could probably be the hardest worker and one of best people you could hire, but if they don't present themselves well then they don't tend to get as far in the interview process.

Monique: It's kind of sad to see like how it affects all different industries. Like back home like it was my friend is a manager at a Payless so I started working there so I could spend more time with her and what not. She's a black female, very curvaceous, very attractive, but Payless is now trying to go high scale and not trying to appeal to like I guess like the lower middle class, I guess if you will. And so they're like trying to hire more attractive people, skinny people. People that kind of look like models, not people like her. So she recently lost her job over it and like she kind of new it was coming but like she was like, "I've been working here for God knows how long, there's no way they're going to do that." And its just sad to see that that, she was probably the hardest worker person they would have ever gotten there. I mean, at a Payless, like really, come on.

Moderator: Is beauty important for happiness?

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Multiple Participants: No. (*And head nods communicating "no"*)
.
Moderator: Yes and no?

Nadia: I think your own view of it your beautiful or not is required for happiness. Because if you think you're not beautiful then your just gonna focus on that and not be as happy as you could be if you just accepted how you were.

Moderator: What about for popularity?

Ashley: I, I wouldn't say so. I say as far as that it's definitely the personality. And especially once you get to know someone better, you can almost completely forget what they look like. And you view their physical appearance based off, like their personality.

Monique: Yeah.

Jessie: Because I feel like so many girls have told me like for like when they pick a boyfriend or something like that. You know like when they initially see a guy who they think is like super attractive they're like "oh awesome" and then they get to know them and their like "oh this is not really going to work out". But then like when they actually date someone seriously like he looks cuter to me because I know him and I know his personality so, I think that like that has a lot to do with that type of thing.

Moderator: Going off of that, with referring to men is it, or even women depending on the type of relationship, is beauty important for romantic relationships for women?

Monique: Yes. I mean, but I don't think its, like she said, its on your own view. Like, I don't know. My boyfriend always said that you know he always makes me feel bad but he's like "you're so gorgeous. Like you could get any other guy walking down the street" and I'm like kind of like "whatever". But the thing is like we've been together for like 2 ½ years, three almost three years. And like when he says things like that I'm just like, like for me that's personally a turn off. And I tell him that all the time, like you can be talking like that. Because then like when you look down upon yourself like if you look down upon yourself like its not going to be hard for other people to look down on you. And its just, you know, cause of that. For me I think he's really attractive just because I know what he's like, I know his personality. And I know the type of support system that I, that we both have with each other when it comes to that.

Amy: And I also think like your insecurities about your looks, if you feel like, you know, you don't have that confidence about who you are, and you're in a relationship, you're going to constantly wonder, so every time your boyfriend or whatever is talking to a pretty girl, someone you think is pretty or you think is better looking then you, you're constantly going to be like,

well what's that about. But she's pretty then me. You know. And you're going to have this whole jealousy thing just because you're not comfortable with who you are.

Jessie: Yeah, I have a friend back home who's like that. Like every time, if she like breaks up with a boyfriend and he starts dating other girls she's like on Facebook like "she's not prettier than me, is she?"

Laughter

Jessie: And like "look at this". And she's like tearing it apart. And you're like, that doesn't have anything to do with it. But it does if you're in a relationship and your not attracted to that person or like people start to loose that attraction. I think that's a lot of times like a very important part of a relationship. Of course you build on it but I think that it definitely has something to do with it.

Moderator: Alright, what I want to do now is actually show you all a small clip of TV sitcom called *Ugly Betty*. I don't know if any of you have heard of it. It airs on ABC. I have paper and a pen in front of you if you want to make any comments during the clip and then I'm going to ask you a few questions about it afterwards.

*****Movie Clip*****

Moderator: Alright, have any of you seen this sitcom before?

Nods communicating "yes" and "uh huh"

Moderator: For those of you who have seen it, what do you think about it? Realistic? Funny?

Monique: I haven't seen the American version but they had the same one a few years ago and an Indian version. And um, and I know the story is the same just because they copied it from a Japanese version.

Lisa: Hispanic.

Monique: And a Hispanic version. And I definitely think that its funny because they're all the same stories but they all have like different perceptions of beauty, kind of like matching their culture. And I think its very interesting because I kind of think it's true. Like when you look in those higher like industrial or like professional like areas where you have to like, everything's about your strut, your swagger and how you carry yourself. I definitely think it is important. And I think that when she was like running up the stairs talking about you know front to back about their publications you know, and the boss or whoever he is in the show, he definitely caught, like she caught his attention because she knows everything inside and out. It's just like, now we have to make her into an experiment. Like how do we fix her to fit her into our puzzle, you know.

Moderator: Alright, describe Betty for me.

Amy: Ambitious.

Tonya: Confident.

Zara: Outgoing.

Moderator: What else?

Tori: She doesn't have that many social skills. She doesn't pick up on a lot of cues that other people might.

Monique: Too extroverted.

Lisa: I feel like she's a cute girl. Like I mean I know the actress who plays her and I feel like it's so clear that they like dumb her like dumb down her looks.

Amy: There was actually a spread in the magazine this past year. And it was actually talking about all the, you know, quote on quote geeks and/or unattractive females that they put in TV shows and what they really look like. And it took America Ferrara and it said *Ugly Betty* and it had a picture of her character and a picture of her. And she's gorgeous. But she's also pushed through a lot of lines. Like she started out with the movie *Real Women have Curves*. And she was a lot bigger than she is now and she was totally confident with herself. And then they also took the girl from *The Office* who in the show is kind of like your everyday normal person. And then they took a person of her when she looks like normal and she's just as pretty as you know, Julia Roberts and Angelina or whatever. And so, they were trying to point out that these girls are really gorgeous but at the same time, it took their character and what their character was supposed to be as like this normal person who does ago. It kind of took out that aspect.

Moderator: So according to the beauty standards we talk about earlier, what is beauty? I mean, what is Betty? According to the standards we talked about earlier.

Zara: Ugly.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Ashley: Unfortunate.

Monique: I think she has like confidence in herself. Like in her work. Like she may not be confident in her appearance but it's very clear that she's very ambitious and she knows what she wants and she's going to go get it. She's a hard worker. So I definitely think that adds to her like personality and her confidence because like I don't, like if you took, ok this is going to sound really weird, but if she took her clothes off she'd be like, amazing.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Jessie: She's like a makeover girl. She's like one of those girls you're like she could be really pretty but lets take her out of that suit let's do this. You know what I mean.

Monique: Yeah.

Jessie: Like people are like, make her more uniform to what everyone thinks is beautiful. Because she has a gorgeous face and she has a cute body and all that. But that just think that, oh cause she's wearing like not whatever from Milan that you know, it doesn't make you beautiful.

Moderator: Speaking of Milan, what about the other woman?

Zara: She has a bad attitude.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Laughter.

Zara: I do not find her attractive at all.

Jessie: She has this tight hair.

Monique: Yeah.

Zara: She's wearing this huge outfit. Like her hair is all tight. She's got on too much make up. She' like -

Lisa: Like high fashion

Nadia: Yeah, she's like "in" fashion but at the same time she looks ridiculous. Like it's supposed to be like this high fashion outfit and what not. But she looks like an idiot.

Lisa: I think it's a European thing though. Like I don't feel like that's something that's amazing in America but like when you go to Europe, like people really dress like that. But

Zara: But there was not accent, she wasn't European.

Jessie: I feel just if she was nicer too. I feel like if she was more nicer too she'd be more attractive. Like she was so rude. Like even if she was dressed like that and she was nice, you'd be like "oh ok, whatever". But she's like really rude.

Moderator: So according to beauty standards, what is she? According to the standards we talked about earlier.

Monique: I'd put her in her place in a second. I'd be like, "look honey"

Zara: According to beauty standards by the media, she'd probably be considered beautiful but.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Amy: I think that Betty's also aware of how people view her. Like she's wearing this crazy outfit and stuff like that. And she's not like the woman in Dolce. But she, I think she's aware. Like when he made that face and stuff like that she said, you have the job you just don't like what I look like. And so she's not confident, she's self conscious. But at the same time I think like she said with the comfortable with how like with her jobs and skills and everything. But she also I think is aware of what people see.

Moderator: Okay. Now that we've watched this brief clip of *Ugly Betty* I want to ask you again, how do you define or describe beauty.

Carol: Confidence.

Kayla: Intelligence.

Nadia: Attitude.

Zara: I mean, your presentation. Like, I don't want to sound shallow but the way you present yourself is the first thing someone sees. You could be an amazing worker. You could be the best person ever, serve your community. But if you don't look like any of those things, no one's going to give you that credit.

Jessie: I was going to say even though it doesn't even matter like what context you take it in. Like I play lacrosse here for club and like when you walk on the field and you see a girl with pink cleats and a pink stick and like everyone just initially looks at her and is like are you kidding me, like you're not going to do anything out here. And then they end up being some of the best players. So I think that it's just like you instantly take it in and like whatever context you're in. And like that just doesn't look right for where we are right now.

Monique: My best friend is gorgeous. She's done some modeling in the past and its weird because she's like clumsiest, clutziest, ditziest person I've ever met in my life. And like there's three of us and we're nothing alike. Like we still love each other but like when she goes to interviews and stuff she just does like some of the dumbest things ever. And I just look at her like, she comes out like knowing she didn't get the job. And its like the little things that really count she doesn't have. And I'm just like, I still love you for it. It's alright. You entertain me so -

Moderator: Ok, again, since we've watched the clip, how do you define ugliness for women?

Monique: Attitude.

Lisa: I think its personality both ways. Like women are always saying things like, she's not cute but I like her personality. Or she's cute, but her personality, you know what I mean. Like whether or like we like, like when we size someone up. At the end of the day, if we like them, if we think they're cool or not cool. And I feel like that has to do with their perception because

you're like, if they're cool then we give them more credit for their looks or if you don't think they're cool you take away from their looks.

Monique: My roommate is very quiet, she doesn't have like people skills. And that's kind of what turns her off for people, you know turns people away from her. And I did random. And we get along so well, its amazing. But like I kind of feel like she puts herself out there in not good ways and I kind of feel like that definitely takes away from her image.

Moderator: Alright, again, what influences your idea of beauty, the beauty standards that you consider is out there for women? What influences your ideas of beauty and ugliness?

Ashley: Again I think it's the girls you're around, like I said, your friends and family. No one in my family is very, well girly. So there's a lot of make stuff like that I, like things that I never learned about. It just wasn't part of my family.

Jessie: I think it depends on your social circle too. Cause like if I show up to a lacrosse meeting or something wearing heels and a dress, that I know like you would have to wear to certain stuff, like maybe a sorority chapter meeting, like you have to look really nice for. I think that all depends on what influences you because you know that if you're going to look inappropriate for something you're doing everyone's going to be like, it looks really awkward.

Lisa: I think boys you like, like I know guys I've liked and I look at their past girlfriends and I like, I size myself up to like oh this is what they like. Like do I like whether or not I fit that or I don't' fit that and kind of like makes me recognize what boys are looking at and also where I think I fit in the equation.

Moderator: Alright, now are these influences the same for all women? Different for yourself and other women?

Monique: To some extent. Cause culture definitely has a lot to do with it. Cause like especially if like your parents are born somewhere else and come to America and then you're first generation American like its definitely hard cause its like you have to fit in both worlds but you don't fit neither. So I think its kind of the same for everybody but kind of in their own way.

Tori: And also like everyone has their judgments, like everyone judges women. Like everyone is drawn to beautiful things so in that sense its like a natural tendency to look around and like judge or size yourself up.

Moderator: Alright, so based on the brief scene we just watched from Ugly Betty, I want to ask you again to consider the influence of the mass media. Do you think this TV sitcom and other mediums play a role in shaping society's view of beauty and ugliness?

Zara: Yeah.

Moderator: How so?

Zara: I mean, it shows you that like, I mean, you can be strong and hardworking and not the most attractive person and you can make it work for you. And that I guess in influencing society, its more of a realistic approach I guess. Where she goes home, she has her sister. Her sister's beautiful but I mean, I don't know. But yeah. It definitely like changes the way people see things.

Amy: Also, in the Hispanic version like Ugly Betty. Like the girl that plays the Ugly Betty character, she's, like dresses, she's a nerd. And then she has her makeover. She actually has it and she looks beautiful. But then when she goes to work she actually goes back to what she looks like initially. And like there's love triangles and stuff like that. And there's a guy that falls in love with her because she like when she's in her beautiful mode and then there's a guy who falls in love with her when she's back to what she was. And when it comes down to her choice, she chooses the guy that loved her either way. You know, and I think that message is trying to say you know don't fall for, you know don't change yourself for men. And I, like that's from the media, you know. And that's something that's not usually put out cause you're generally thinking, oh I need to do this and he'll like me more. But then you know I think some outlets not all but some are trying to help change that.

Moderator: What outlets? Which mediums?

Elizabeth: I know Dove did a campaign, it was like Campaign for Real Beauty. Like they had a couple commercials and there were these little girls and she was like she thinks she's ugly. Like she thinks she's fat. And it kind of made you think. Like and they were doing clinics and stuff like to help girls like feel like they're beautiful and stuff and some of the commercials like show the everyday people like coming into an ad place and they take a picture of her and it shows how they change her face and like airbrush and everything like that, and they put it up on a billboard. And like compared to the picture its like, is that the same person? But it was just an everyday girl. And like it shows how it changes stuff.

Amy: Also its this new show on Lifetime and I don't know if its new. But its like called "How to look good naked" and it has the guy from fab five or whatever. And he takes these women that are you know that don't have confidence and have self esteem issues and like tries to show how their beautiful inside and how they can look you know like the name of the show, how to look good naked.

Jessie: But then on the same page you have a million shows that's on there like, what's that show "Ten years younger" and how to dress, and how to look, and blah blah blah. Its like its every, for every show I feel like you have like that you definitely have like five that are telling you opposite things. So it's like there's a struggle.

Zara: Well I think in the mainstream TV its becoming more prevalent to show like different types of people. But like on friends, they were all skinny and looked the same way. But now, on like Grey's Anatomy you have Tiffany, Meredith, has Christina. Like all different ethnicities, all different sizes. Same with and like you see them with like before they go to work where they have stuff on their face just looking like everyday women. So that's helping to sort of bridge the gap between what is real beauty and what the media presents as beauty.

Lisa: But I feel like when I watch it, when I, I don't watch this show that much, like not in a bad way I just mean like when I do watch that show I still feel like clearly you know which people are supposed to be the sex pot and which is supposed to be like the hard ass like woman at the job.

Moderator: Now who are these media influences stronger for? Are they stronger for you? For other women? A certain age group? Media images such as these.

Zara: I mean, I feel like the media always plays to younger people to get them earlier so that they can, like make up, young girls love to play with make up. And then if they start them early then they'll be buying their makeup for the rest of their life. If they start them early doing this product then they'll be doing this for the rest of their life or for a longer time. So its always towards younger girls. More impressionable people.

Jessie: I think it I think it can affect a lot of people because even in the presidential campaign like there's like those magazines that usually just pick at celebrities were picking at Sarah Palin, like, you know what I mean. It doesn't have to only be like this certain. It depends on what circles you run in cause it definitely, media is going to affect, I feel like younger people more but at the same time like the people we're looking at are older than us usually or are older than you and its obviously affecting them because they're the ones representing it.

Monique: I definitely think it also has to do with experiences. Because like I didn't always like this. I used to be the biggest tom boy ever. Oh my God. All the guys that I ever liked when I was younger were like "oh, you know, you're a tomboy, I'd never like you, blah blah blah". And I definitely like you know big colorful fat glasses and you know my hair was always in a braid because that's what my parents did and they put oil in it so I mean you know it would stay nice and healthy. And it looked ugly and I was alright with it, you know. And, yeah I had braces at one point whatever, whatever. And I was really skinny and tall and I was short and fat. So it was like, I never was really normal. So I definitely you know I did what I had to do for myself and whatever made me happy, what made me comfortable. And I wouldn't change it for the world. And I don't take media influence like to heart because I'm just like, you know I know I'm not going to pay 100,000 dollars for some surgery that I don't want. And I don't like needles and stuff so I'm not going to do it. And its just it definitely in fact I think that experience has a lot to do with it.

Moderator: Now considering this discussion we just had about Ugly Betty and the media, I'd like to ask you again, how do you judge these types of beauty standards for females. Realistic? Unrealistic? Idealistic? One-dimensional? Longstanding?

Monique: Still unrealistic.

Moderator: Is Betty realistic?

Zara: Not really.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Zara: She's kind of like an exaggerated version of ugliness.

Jessie: Yeah, I don't think its fair because its either like, in all these movies, like even in like *Devil Wears Prada*, they always have to look completely awful or completely awesome. Like they never just get to like keep an average person.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. ((*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Jessie: There's never like, you never get to be like what you know, what you feel good but you're still not buying in to all that.

Ashley: It's like a caricature of stereotyping.

Moderator: So with the other woman in the clip, is she unrealistic too?

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Monique: Yeah. She's definitely exaggerated. Because you don't see all models look nice and they try to, you know in their house they'd be, they're chilling in sweat pants and basketball tees too.

Jessie: It's like Americas Next Top Model. The only time that they really look that way is when they've been like airbrushed on. They're like, you know photography. But when they're in the house or when they are like you know going to a job they're all just wearing jeans and a t-shirt and don't care.

Moderator: Alright, I want to ask you again, is beauty important for different types of success? I'll start with career.

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Elizabeth: You have to sell yourself first before you can sell your idea.

Moderator: Okay, what about for happiness?

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Jessie: Personal happiness, like personal. The way you look at people.

Moderator: So is beauty important for that. Beauty is important for that happiness or just happiness in general?

Monique: How you perceive..

Ashley: Your own perception of your own beauty.

Moderator: Your own perception of your beauty? Ok. Alright, what about for popularity?

Multiple Participants: No. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Monique: I mean in high school people are really really critical. And its like if you are like Mean Girls for example, if those girls were in a real high school they would be thrown in trash cans right now. Its just unrealistic. Its too much of an exaggeration.

Moderator: Alright, what about for romantic relationships.

Zara: You have to be attracted to the person you love. I mean it might start physically and then evolve into something more but you don't see someone and think like that's the person I would want to talk to then. You're probably never going to.

Amy: I know a girl who's really, she's really pretty. And her boyfriend is not what you, you know, just by looking at him, you wouldn't consider hot by any means. He's a nice guy and they've been together for over a year. And some people will be like she's dating him?

Multiple Participants: Yeah. (*And head nods communicating "yes"*)

Tori: You see that all the time. If people see a girl dating a guy who's maybe not as cute as her or vice versa, like, it throws people off but at the same time its like common.

Amy: Oh yeah. And its like great because you like see that and you're like yeah. You know, you're obviously not going to sit there and get all into it but it does shock people because you don't know that or you didn't realize that that was the boyfriend she was talking about or that was the girlfriend that he was talking about. And, and it kind of it makes you feel better. And then also it kind of makes you feel bad at the same time because you thought that.

Jessie: I think too like it depends on, cause like I have like three of my like closest friends, I would never ever pick their, their, the people that they choose for boyfriends or the people that they find attractive. Like I just have a totally different opinion, like I don't, you know I like have one friend who she really likes like super, super athletic guys that have that certain look. And like, I don't know, I usually go for more like goofy kind of guys. So like it kind of depends on, depends on your personality and what you consider beautiful.

Monique: Kind of what she was talking about, like, like all my best friends say the same thing about my boyfriend. Like we've been together for almost 3 years, like I said, and throughout that their like "you're still with him" like "you didn't find anyone at Tech"? You know, and its so weird because he's so, I'm very extrovert and outgoing and, you know, and kind of like a go getter. And he's like chill and like mellow and kind of go with the flow. And all his friends are like "dude, what are you doing? Why do you go out with her if she's crazy, she's not human. Leave her". So its interesting. Its interesting.

Moderator: Alright, well thank you so much for attending this focus group session. We've had a great discussion about beauty and your participation is greatly appreciated. I'm going to hand you all a debriefing sheet that gives you more information about the study and it includes the purpose, like I said its for my Master's thesis, it will explain that more. And it gives you my contact information and Dr. Williams' if you want to contact us about the findings afterwards. So what I want to ask you to do now is on that sticky note in front of you, could you write down your ethnicity and your age and then put that on top of your consent form. The stapled copy is yours. I'm also going to pass out the sign up sheet. Make sure to sign in so I can give you credit. And then I'm going to hand out the debriefing sheet. And I just want to thank you ladies again. I think this was a good discussion.

Session #3 – Thursday, November 6, 2008 – Start time approx. 6:00 p.m.
Duration of Study - 34:30

Moderator: Welcome and thank you for participating in this study! My name is Adria Goldman and I am one of the researchers for this project as well as the moderator for this focus group session. What we are going to do today is have an open discussion about beauty. I'll ask a few questions just to prompt the dialogue. Next, we'll watch a brief clip of a new television sitcom. After that, we'll finish up our discussion on beauty and I will end by giving you more information about the study along with the contact information of the research team. As noted on your consent form, this session will be audio and video recorded. This is only for the purpose of data collection and it will not be released to anyone outside of the research team. In the report of findings, you're name will not be associated with your responses. The recordings will be stored in my office – a secure location that is locked. You will also notice that I have another person operating the camera. This is Sarah. She is here so that I may actively participate in the discussion with you all. She understands that all information discussed is confidential and she has assured me that she will not share our conversation with anyone upon completion of this session. Also, please keep in mind that there isn't any right or wrong answer to these questions. So please feel free to share your views and opinions. Our goal today is to have an open discussion about beauty. I can assure you that your responses, views, and opinions will not affect the credit you receive for participating in this study as well as your standing in any of your courses. None of your information will be released to anyone outside of the research team. I must also ask you to abide by this same level of confidentiality and not share any information discussed during this session with anyone. I also must ask everyone to keep an open mind during this discussion and respect every individual as well as their views and opinions. Since you have all signed up through the Communication Department's Research Participation Pool, you will be given credit based on the agreement between you and your instructor. If you feel at some point that you are not comfortable with participating, you are free to leave and will still receive credit. Are there any questions? First I want us to start by going around and introducing ourselves. Let everyone know our name, major, and year. I'll going to also introduce myself and I'm going to ask Sarah to introduce herself. Like I said, my name is Adria Goldman. I am a second year Master's student in the Department of Communication. And I am actually working on this for my Master's thesis.

Okay, and I'm Sarah Swedberg. I'm also a second year graduate student here in the Department of Communication.

Moderator: Ok, can we start on this side of the table. (*NOTE: Names of female participants have been changed in order to maintain confidentiality*).

August: I'm August. I'm a sophomore and I'm an Economics and Finance major.

May: May. I'm a Public Relations major and I'm a senior.

June: I'm June. I'm a sophomore and an English major.

April: I'm April. I'm a senior Communication major.

Cindy: I'm Cindy. I'm a junior Communication major.

Marsha: I'm Marsha. I'm a junior Human Development major.

Alice: I'm Alice and I'm a Communication major, sophomore.

Jane: Jane. I'm a Communication major and I'm a senior.

Moderator: Okay. Alright, now as I ask these questions you don't have to raise your hand or anything. Just jump in. Okay, so first I want to ask you all, how do you describe or define beauty for women. What makes a woman beautiful? What defines it? What is "beautiful"?

May: I feel like that is a hard question because so many people have different definitions, you know. And I feel like everyone is pretty in their own way.

Moderator: Anyone else?

April: I think you have to look at the total package. Everything that makes a person who they are, what they do, what they stand for, their convictions.

Marsha: It's so much more than what's on the outside. Like you can say, "oh she looks so pretty" but then if you get to know her your like "ewww" or that makes her more attractive.

Moderator: Anyone else? Are there certain characteristics that make up beauty?

Alice: I feel like there's two different kinds of beauty. If there's like a physical beauty and like an inner beauty. So it just like depends on what kind you're talking about.

Moderator: So what makes physical beauty?

Alice: Personal preferences.

Moderator: Personal preferences. So there's no general idea of beauty?

Alice: Isn't there like that, what is it, the Golden Rule or something. That like facial structure they say. And obviously, people who are like fit always seems to be someone attractive.

Moderator: Anybody else?

August: I think someone who's like outgoing and confident. Someone who just like presents themselves well. And the whole symmetry thing too. Like your eyes up here or something.

Laughter

Cindy: I think it's in the eye of the beholder. I mean maybe someone likes someone with the eye up there.

Moderator: Ok. How do you define ugliness for women?

April: When somebody has a bad attitude. Like they're never satisfied, always complaining.

Moderator: What else?

Cindy: Someone who's dishonest. I think, like she said, there's two levels of, you know, like perceived ugliness. But I think like inward people can be like really mean spirited.

Alice: I think like as you get older or as you've gotten older, I feel like you look more inward for beauty or ugliness. So, when I was little like I think I used to think ugly was something completely different then I think it is now. Like now I think more about your morals, your values, the kind of person you are, the decisions you make.

Moderator: Now I know some of you mentioned that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. So its kind of different for different people. But for your personal definitions – like how would you personally define beauty and ugly? Like aside from what every else thinks, what would you define as being beautiful.

Alice: Like physical characteristics wise?

Moderator: Physical, inner, whatever.

Alice: So for a guy, like for me.

Moderator: Well, for women. How would you define it for women?

Alice: Oh, like a beautiful woman.

Moderator: Inner, outer, however you define it.

Jane: Personally for me, confidence is the number one thing that stands out.

Moderator: Ok. Anybody else?

August: Their appearance. Like if they're well groomed and well dressed.

Cindy: I think selflessness.

Moderator: Ok, what about your personal definitions of ugly?

Marsha: I think more of a person's attitude can make them come across to be ugly rather than physical things.

Moderator: Ok. Anybody else? Alright, what do you think influences your idea of beauty and ugliness?

Jane: TV.

Laughter.

May: Yeah, I was going to say the media.

Moderator: How so? How does the media influence your ideas?

Alice: Didn't they say like back in the day models were supposed to be like a size 8 or 10 and then like Twiggy came in and then like everyone started turning skinny. That's something that's obviously. And then there's like Tyra Banks how's you know like one of the people with the voluptuous body. So that's kind of like coming back.

Moderator: Alright, what specific mediums? Advertising? I know you all mentioned television. Sitcoms, dramas, movies?

May: Movies.

June: I think magazines too. People on the covers of those are unrealistic I think.

Marsha: And now airbrush is used on the magazines. I always like when they put the movie stars on the front of the magazine. They're like "oh my God we caught them without their makeup on". Its like yeah, they don't look that good with make up on either.

Moderator: Now does the media influence both you ideas of beauty and ugliness? Both? One or the other?

May: I think more beauty then ugly cause I don't feel like ugliness is really ever on media. I mean it sometimes is but most of the time its people that are beautiful, I feel like.

August: And like people who are ugly on TV are still pretty.

May: Yeah, like *Ugly Betty*.

Multiple Participants: Yeah.

August: Yeah, she's still cute.

May: Yeah, she's still pretty.

Moderator: Okay. What other things influence your idea of beauty and ugliness?

April: Interacting with people.

Moderator: Okay, how so?

April: Just, you know. Out in society having to deal with people. Like, you know in day to day life. Going to classes. Situations especially when you're forced to interact with people. Like group work, you have to deal with different personalities.

Moderator: Anybody else? What influences your ideas of beauty and ugliness.

May: I feel like friends and family do.

Moderator: Do they help you define it?

May: Well, I don't know. Like if a friend, like if you're talking to a friend about guys or whatever. If there's a friend that's like "oh he's not that cute" you're going to think twice if he's cute, you know.

Alice: I think your culture also probably has a big impact.

Moderator: Okay. Now are these influences the same for you and other women? Are these just personal influences or do you think there are different influences for other women.

June: I think everyone has different experiences so its definitely different. Not everyone is going to be exposed to the same things.

Moderator: Alright, in terms of the media influence, I know you all talked about TV and models and everything. Do you think that the media's influences on beauty standards is stronger for you personally? Or for other women? Do you think other women are help back by them more? Who do you think they have a stronger influence on?

April: Probably teenagers and kids.

Moderator: Any specific reason why you think that is so?

April: Just cause they're still developing their ideas. They're more impressionable.

Moderator: Anybody else agree or disagree?

Alice: Yeah I agree, like you're not as confident with who you are when you're younger. So you don't really have like the, I feel like your inner beauty doesn't come until you're older. So like all you really have, or you don't really understand it. So that would influence you much more, like all you perceive.

Cindy: But I do think that there are older women who like struggle with confidence. Because I think that when your body starts changing and obviously as you get older like your body goes through a lot of changes too. And I think that there's a lot of women who don't want to accept those changes and I think that the media did that. When you can look at show like *The Real Desperate Housewives* and stuff like that and see all the women who get all the plastic surgery and things like that. So I feel like there are older women who go through those same struggles.

Moderator: Anybody else? Do you think the influence is stronger on a certain group? I know you said age group. Any others?

May: I feel like in Blacksburg its not that bad. I mean, we're in the country. But if you go out to like L.A. or like D. C. or New York it's a lot more. I feel like people are a lot more influenced by media.

Moderator: So in the city?

May: Yeah.

Moderator: Okay

Cindy: People with money so some kind of like a social status to keep.

August: Yeah, people who have time to care about stuff like that.

Moderator: Okay, anybody else? Alright, well how do you all judge these beauty standards for beauty and ugly? Are they fair? Are they realistic? Are they one dimensional? How do you define, how do you judge them?

Alice: I think its frustrating for a lot of girls. Like you know when you're with like a guy who looks at a couple magazines and is like "she's so hot". You know, like "her bod's so awesome". You're like, yeah, that's not real. You know. And I think that's like frustrating but I think we all know like its like its almost been overplayed like in the media. There's just kind of like, its like its fading out like people almost don't even care anymore. I feel like we're not as influenced as we used to be.

Moderator: Anybody else? Are these beauty standards fair for you all? Realistic? Long standing?

Cindy: I think they're transparent. I mean, I feel like they're just, it, like it's unrealistic for the majority of the people in this country, women can't keep up to those standards. So I think that it's very hard for people. I think that, I don't know. Just, it's not worth it.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, is beauty important for different types of success in society? I'm going to start with careers. Is beauty important in order to get, to be successful in careers?

April: I guess it depends on the career. Like obviously if you want to be a model you have to look a certain way. But other careers, I don't think it should matter.

May: I feel like people are going to be more likely to hire like attractive people as opposed to not attractive. So I think to some degree it is important.

Marsha: Or also just how you present yourself. Like if you dress nicely or you look put together like you actually care people are going to want you to represent their company.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, is beauty important in order to be successful in terms of popularity?

May: I don't think so. In high school, some of the most popular girls like weren't necessarily the most attractive girls in the school but they were like really fun and outgoing so.

Cindy: I think it's circumstantial. I mean I feel like I've encountered people who would I guess be you know socially considered really attractive or you know who definitely held popularity in high school. But, then there are people who are just really confident and just got along with people and seemed to have a lot of friends too, so.

Marsha: People are popular in like different circles of people. In the whole school or high school or whatever people might not know who they are but in like a smaller circle, they're might be more popular kids in them.

Moderator: Alright, is beauty important for happiness? Do you have to be beautiful in order to be happy?

May: No.

Cindy: Not physically, but I think if you have inner beauty I think you feel better. I mean I feel better about myself when I know I'm doing good things or being a good person.

Alice: I think being confident helps with your happiness. As long as your confident with who you are, that's all that matters.

Moderator: What about for romantic relationships? Is beauty important for that?

April: Not really. Because you see a lot of people who wouldn't necessarily appeal to the best looking people. But they could still find a perfect match. And be happier than some couples who are considered beautiful so.

Moderator: Anybody else?

Alice: A lot of people think personality is more important than appearance.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, is there anything we didn't talk about pertaining to beauty that you think we need to add? Alright well I know some of you actually mentioned Ugly Betty

and what I want to now is actually show you a brief clip of Ugly Betty. So, I'm assuming a few of you have seen it before. So we're just going to watch a small clip.

****Video Clip*****

Moderator: So how many of you have actually seen this show before? (4 hands) Alright what do you all think about this show?

Jane: It's hilarious.

Moderator: Why is it hilarious?

Jane: Because like they always turn Betty down because of how she dresses or the fact that she has braces. And they like, it's a fashion magazine. Apparently your supposed to not have that kind of appearance. Your supposed to be beautiful but Betty makes it work. And like in later seasons they realize you Betty's not all that bad. Even if she dresses goofy or not to their standards. You know, they learn to like her.

Moderator: Okay, what about others who have seen it before? What do you'll think about it?

Cindy: I think it's a really good example, I mean for people to watch. Just to kind of show like you can be yourself and like, I don't know, be successful and still influence others and still have an impact on society.

Moderator: Alright, so describe Betty for me. Based on the beauty standards that we talked about earlier, what do you think about her? Describe her for me. Just from the clip – even if you've seen it before – just from the clip.

April: She's passionate and driven, full of life.

Moderator: Okay. What else?

Jane: Persistent. Smart.

Moderator: Anything else? Alright, so according to beauty standards is she beautiful or ugly?

April: Beautiful.

Moderator: Okay. Why is she beautiful?

April: I think, you know, even if you're looking at appearances you can look at her and tell she's beautiful. She has really a cute smile and, you know, she's always smiling and happy. So, I can't think of any reason why she's not beautiful.

Moderator: Okay. Anybody else? Do the rest of you think she's beautiful? Does anyone see her as being ugly? Or see other people in society as seeing her as ugly because of beauty standards?

Alice: I think the glasses and braces, I mean obviously when she's not in character and she's not wearing her glasses and braces, she looks more glamorous. But we know what she looks like without the, like we know it's a show. So its hard for us to say like, you know, because she's not that character. But I think like its, for her character and personality it kind of makes her really goofy and lovable so I think so.

Moderator: Okay. Anybody else?

Cindy: I think she has her own style. I think that that's kind of, I don't know. I mean obviously compared to the model who, you know, like obviously has the means to wear that kind of stuff, that's great. But I feel like she's more like relatable to like a normal person who, you know, is just trying to make it through.

Moderator: Alright, speaking of the model who sat beside her, describe her for me. Describe the other woman in the clip.

Marsha: She had a very ugly attitude about her.

Moderator: Okay. What else?

Alice: She was tall and skinny.

Cindy: She's a witch.

May: She's kind of like a b. You know, like a biotch.

Moderator: Alright. So according to beauty standards, is she beautiful or ugly?

Jane: Even with her lousy personality, she's still pretty. By those standards.

Moderator: Anybody else?

Cindy: I think like, what she said, she's pretty and men would say she's beautiful. I think it's a difference between the two. She's pretty but I think beautiful is more like a package.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, well now that we've watched this brief scene of Ugly Betty, I'd like to ask you again, how do you define or describe beauty for women?

Cindy: It's still just like what [April] said in the beginning, like being the total package. Like you know, portraying confidence by having a good attitude, by being driven, being motivated, you know. And again, with outward appearance, I think that just being yourself is beautiful if you know you have funny teeth or you know googly eyes, I don't know. Like if you're going to be proud of your googly eye I think that you know, that's beautiful and that's what beauty is.

Moderator: What about everybody else, what do you think?

Marsha: We saw examples of like more inner beauty and more superficial beauty so, I take the inner beauty any day. Like for someone I'd want to be friends with or for someone to hang out with. It seems like someone I'd rather spend more time with.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, again I want to ask you how do you define or describe ugliness for women? What makes a woman ugly?

May: I think it's like what we said before, like just an ugly personality and not necessarily like exterior.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, again what influences your ideas of beauty and ugliness for women? What helps you create your definitions of beauty and ugliness.

Jane: My folks. They taught me to appreciate everyone and to always look for like the best in everyone. Not just physical, but as well as inner stuff.

Moderator: Ok. Anybody else? What influences your ideas and definitions of beauty and ugliness for women? Alright, what influences other women's definitions of beauty and ugly.

Marsha: I guess the people, like your circle of friends. Like if you're in a group of people who will be more judgmental about appearances then you would start acting that way whereas if they looked more towards the inside of that person you would look more towards that too.

Moderator: Okay. Anybody else?

May: Culture, like we said earlier.

Moderator: Okay. Others?

April: I think what she was saying like I think it is a lot having to do with upbringing. Like if your parents tell you you're beautiful, that kid's going to have more confidence than a kid who never hears it, so.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, well based on the brief scene we just watched from Ugly Betty I want to ask you again to consider the influence of the mass media. Do you think this TV show and other media play a role in shaping society's view of beauty and ugliness for women?

August: I think it kind of makes fun of it, if anything.

Moderator: Make fun of the beauty standards?

August: Yeah, definitely. I feel like the who show is kind of just making fun of the industry a lot and how we take beauty so seriously.

Alice: I think that's why it's so popular too. I mean, you watch shows like that Dr. 90210. You know, shows that are dedicated to cosmetic surgery, its kind of refreshing to watch something like *Ugly Betty*. It's more real.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, are these, would these media influences on beauty standards such as the ones in Ugly Betty, would it be stronger for you or do you think it would be stronger for other women? Other types of women? Is the influence the same?

Cindy: I think people with low self esteem are easy targets for the media influence. I think that you know if you're not confident with who you are, you know, your own personal appearance and your own upbringing, I think it's easy to get sucked in to wanting to imitate these kind of celebrities or imitate these images that come from the media.

Alice: I think of it depends on the person you want to be. Like some people want to be beautiful. Like that's what their goal is. Some want to be doctors. It's just kind of like what you dedicate your time to.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, considering the discussion we've have this far about Ugly Betty and beauty standards and the media, I'd like to ask you again how do you judge these types of beauty standards for females? Again, are they fair? Unrealistic? Longstanding? One dimensional? What do you think about them?

April: I like shows like *Ugly Betty* because its pointing out that there unfair. And its making us think about it. So it makes me believe that slowly those ideas are going to dissolve a little bit.

Moderator: Are the characters in *Ugly Betty*, the ones that you've seen, do they seem realistic?

April: Umm Hmmm.

Moderator: How so? Why are they so realistic?

April: I think there are a lot of girls like Betty. And the model, I mean I've never met a model, but that seems realistic.

Cindy: I think even like the, whoever, like I don't know if the guy was an assistant or whatever his job was. Hiring manager or whatever. But I think that there are people like that too who do judge people upon appearance or if someone has a particular style that they don't think follows some kind of a norm I think that it is unfair. And I think that this show does a great job of portraying, I mean maybe to an extreme, but they're definitely people like that.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, so again, I want to revisit a question that I asked you before the clip. Is beauty important for successful careers?

Cindy: Depends on your goals.

Alice: I don't think it's important, but I don't think it could hurt you.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, what about for happiness? Are beautiful people happier than ugly people.

May: I don't think so. And sometimes, I think people who make the standards of beauty are like sadder than people who don't make that standard because they're always trying to, this isn't like everybody, but like they're trying to like be that, if that makes sense.

Alice: Because it's what everyone else sees them as. Nothing more than just a pretty face or something.

April: I think people that aren't as pretty feel as if they have to prove themselves in other ways. So they build confidence in those other ways.

Moderator: So are beautiful people more successful with romance than ugly people? Is beauty important at all for relationships?

Alice: Attractiveness is the first thing that you look at but its all about their personality.

May: I was just going to say, like you said earlier, beauty's in the eye of the beholder so I mean, I think it's a cool thing that I can pick somebody that's not attractive at all and then my friend is like enthralled by them. So its cool like everybody in the world finds someone attractive.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, are beautiful people more popular?

Cindy: No.

Moderator: So is beauty even necessary for popularity?

Multiple nods communicating "no"

August: Overall, yeah, I think it is necessary.

Moderator: It is? How so?

August: Just because like, I don't know, like naturally people gravitate to attractive people. Like I mean if you're ugly, obviously you can be popular and everything too. You just have to have that extra, like something extra about you. Like you just have to work that much harder, you know what I mean?

Moderator: Anybody else? I know some of you were shaking your head that it wasn't important.

Alice: I think it depends on your age group. Like I never feel like, I mean I went to an all girls boarding school so I never, there was never even that popularity. Like no one's more popular than anybody else. And I still don't feel like it's that way in college. Maybe because it's such a big university but I never felt that.

Moderator: Okay.

Cindy: I feel like it's a personality thing. I mean I feel people are more drawn to people who might be more like welcoming or more extroverted. Or more, I don't know, just more confident in themselves. I don't know, it can be attributed necessarily like the way a person looks all the time. I mean in some cases maybe.

Moderator: Anybody else? Alright, anything you want to say about the clip or the two characters that I haven't asked you about that you think is important? Alright well thank you so much for attending this focus group session. We've had a great discussion bout beauty and your participation is greatly appreciated. I'm going to give you a debriefing sheet that gives you more information about the study, this includes the purpose and all the contact information for all the researchers involved. Also, on the sticky not in front of you, if you could right down your ethnicity, your age, and make sure to put that on the signed consent form that you're leaving behind. And the stapled copy is yours.

Focus Group Response Chart

KEY:
Italics – answers for current question that resulted from another question
???? – Yet determined if response is relevant to question or study
Bold Italics – yet determined if response/information can be used; not asked in same way for all sessions
***** **- multiple respondents made comment or verbally agreed with comment**

1.) Define beauty for women

a.) Pre-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- Confidence* - Comfy with how you feel or present yourself - Inward beauty vs. outward beauty: outward how they appear outside or take care of self; inward how they act and moral values. - Predominately outward beauty - Good skin - Being attractive to men - Meeting media's beauty standards - Appropriate weight for body type - Knowing how to dress for body size/style - Dressing according to style and season - Uniqueness - Individuality - In eye of the beholder - Depends on person and personal idea of beauty - No universal standard	- depends on way person carries themselves - defined by attitude - based on own perception - confidence - not cocky - not stick thin - not over processed; natural - not having too much plastic surgery to take away originality (other side – plastic surgery not bad if not overboard) - uniqueness*	- hard to say; so many definitions of beauty - everyone pretty in own way - beauty is a total package - more than outer beauty - two kinds of beauty: physical and inner - based on personal preferences - Golden Rule (symmetry); general idea of beauty - Outgoing - Confidence - Symmetry (facial) - In eye of the beholder - *Look more inward for beauty as you get older* - *Confidence* - *Well groomed* - *Well dressed* - *selfless*

Session 1		
of beauty		
- Traditional views: thinner over fatter; taller over shorter.		
- Definition depends on culture		

b.) <u>Post-stimulus</u>

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- Tall - healthy weight - well taken care of - well groomed and well kept; not necessarily "done up" - not rude - friendly ("smiling when you enter the room") - nice personality - warm fuzzy feeling (as opposed to cold harsh attitude) - someone you'd want to hang with	- confidence - intelligence - attitude (assuming good) - based on your presentation (your appearance must match positive qualities) - your presentation as determined by your context	- total package - being yourself - being comfortable with your outside appearance - having inner beauty rather than just superficial beauty.

2.) <u>Define ugliness for women</u>

a.) <u>Pre-stimulus</u>

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- Dirty - unpleasing to look at (detailed below) - un-kept - bad attitude* - bad teeth - bad skin* - over or under weight - physical deformities - bad hair - disproportional features - no universal standard	- cocky* - bitchy - no substance - do no good with their life - no way to define physical ugliness***	- bad attitude - complains a lot - dishonest - mean spirited - look more inward for ugliness as you get older - More characterized by attitude than by physical features

Session 1		
- (although more so than beauty)		
- some traditional ideas		

b.) <u>Post- Video</u>

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- Rudeness - closed off; dismissive - visually displeasing (details follow) - un-kept - disproportional features - bad hair - teeth - over or under weight - not trying or caring - poor fashion sense	- attitude (assuming negative) - bad personality - distant - no people's skills	- ugly personality more so than exterior

3a.) What influences your idea of beauty and ugliness?

a.) Pre-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- the media - magazines - media and marketing; unequal for women - social environment - friends - family - other girls (guys don't care)** - based on your interests 3b.) Same for other women? - no; depends on where and how you grew up - universal in America - no, depends on where you're from (type of area – styles and shopping)	- other girls* (girls dress for other girls) - the media - your family - guy friends*** ("guys want natural beauty") - *based on demographics* - *younger try harder/more influenced* 3b.) Same for other women? - based on culture** - based on age - younger girls are more influenced***** (older women more confident in themselves) - based on priorities	- TV - Media - Interactions (both intentional and forced) - Friends - Family - Culture 3b.) Same for other women? - different for everyone

		younger women rank beauty as higher priority)	

b.) Post-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- media* - friends - lifestyles (where you grew up and how the area was) - based on income/economic status 3b.) Same for other women? - Yes, the same*****	- girls you're around - friends and family - social circle - setting; people's expectations - boys you like 3b.) same for other women? - differs with culture	- parents 3b.) same for other women? - influenced by circle of friends - influenced by culture - also influenced by parents

4.) What influence do media have on shaping society's views of beauty and ugliness?

a.) Pre-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- media's stick thing models encourage eating disorders - models are really tall ("stuff won't look as good on me if I'm short") - makeover shows (tell people that ugly people need to be fixed to fit in society) - airbrushing in media sets unreal standards - Media doesn't show the average woman*** - Dove made huge impact (assuming positive)	- tabloids and magazines focusing on celebrities looks (especially weight); makes you think you should look like them - TV characters and models in magazines always tan, tall, skinny, and beautiful with makeup and really expensive clothes; influences women - Advertising; for example – about makeup, it's constantly reinforced in your	- movies have an influence - magazines; people on cover are unrealistic - airbrushing makes celebrities look so beautiful; without makeup they aren't so pretty either - media images more so influence about beauty - Characters who are supposed to be ugly are really pretty* ("Like Ugly Betty"**)

- Some companies trying to combat negative beauty images - *Some beauty images start off unattractive but become attractive as you learn their personality – may or may not have been intentional by media*	mind. - Product placement*; people relate the stuff they see on the characters to status – so they have to have it - Media images led to eating disorders (trying to push healthier models now because of that) - Media being hypocritical***; talk about good being different or healthy but still show the norm; speaking out against old images because they feel they have to - Characters have strong traits mixed in with the others (example: skinny but strong willed and hard worker) - Not just media's fault; if they changed, viewers would get mad - Media's criticism of other celebrities sets standards for others - **Media not going anywhere; hard to escape it; "we" feed into it**	

b.) Post-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- show presents stereotypes (like UB) - if you think you look like one of the characters, you are going to think you are pretty or ugly like	- yes, media (such as UB) play role in shaping society's view of beauty and ugly - shows that you don't have to be attractive to be successful	- The show mocks the beauty industry and ideas of beauty - UB is so popular – its so refreshing because its real

show says - UB presented model in negative light which is NOT the norm - UB switches and shows how media and standards it sets is unrealistic - Other mediums are beginning to recognize unrealistic images too (Dr. 90210 shows realistic and extreme cases) - There are shows that reinforce stereotypes and some that shine light on them overtly or subtly	- media images (such as UB, Dove, and How to Look Good Naked) are trying to do better with what they reinforce - Struggle between shows that reinforce images and those that try to shine light on them. - Mainstream media starting to show different types of people as characters; bridges gap between what is real beauty and what is mediated beauty - Even with new images, you can still see the stereotypes embedded?	

5.) Who is media influence stronger on (what type of women)?

a.) Pre-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- *yes, influences us personally* - *hard not to look at something and wish you looked like that* - *gives you ideas**** - indirectly affects everyone because it sets standards that you think others will use when judging you. - Depends on the advertisements and who they are geared towards - Older women not affected as much - "our age" most	- varies by age; younger more influenced - preteen to high school more influenced because they are immature and unsure - depends on lifestyle and occupation (example: a nurse not as affected) - depends on subculture and what your tuning into (example: ideal body type differs between CMT and BET)	- stronger on teen and kids because they are more impressionable - stronger on younger girls because they are not as confident - older women influenced too; not wanting to age - women in the city are more influenced - people with money and status are more influenced (have more time to care about stuff like that)

- affected; 18-22 - Guys don't get images are fake - Girls more affected than guys* - Guys are affected but pretend not to care*		

b.) Post-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- *shows like UB emphasize that "I don't have to be tall and skinny"* - *influences me (go out thinking what would media think about my fashion choices)* - *confirms what people already thought* - *confirmation of beauty standards* - younger women influenced more - high school girls influenced more - 14-25 influenced more - Younger than 14-25 - Strong influence getting younger and younger; like preteen – starting at 10 - Strongest when you hit puberty - Strong for middle school students	- media plays to younger women in order to get them early while they are still impressionable - affects younger more but older women affected too (characters we are looking at are older than "us") - based on experiences (once upon a time tomboy not affected)	- affects people with low self esteem more - depends on your goals (affects you more if your goal is to be beautiful) - depends on what you dedicate your time to (affects you more if you dedicate more time to being beautiful)

6.) How do you judge these standards for women?

a.) Pre-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- longstanding* impossible to change	- unrealistic* (never going to look like the	- frustrating because dudes think these

because it's accepted - judge the standards based on who you are - not all standards are unrealistic (there are small grooming things you can do to improve appearance) - common theme now is to show natural beauty (more realistic?) - models are unrealistic (i.e. weight – people not biologically made like that)	models - unfair* (men's standards not as bad) - standards not uneven; men influenced have standards too	standards are hot - transparent - unrealistic (women can't meet those standards) - "not worth it" to try to meet those standards

b.) Post-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- Unrealistic - UB shows the extremes - Makeover shows have people who look REALLY bad	- unrealistic - Betty is unrealistic** - Betty is exaggerated ugliness - Media always shows the extreme* – never the average person - Caricature of stereotyping - Other woman in clip unrealistic and exaggerated too - Other shows unrealistic too (example: ANTM with airbrushing and models always done up)	- standards unfair and UB points this out - characters in UB are realistic - a lot of girls are like Betty - people judge unfairly because of standards/looks - UB shows the extremes (but in good way)

7.) Is beauty important for different types of success in society?

a.) Pre-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
A.) Career - Depends on career - Yes, if you want to be	A.) Career - Yes - Yes; determining	A.) Career - Depends on career; models – yes, others –

a model - Attractive girls more likely to get job - People go off of what they see first (first impression) - May give air of confidence that helps in getting job - Taking time to prepare yourself (appearance) shows org skills - People in jobs want to surround themselves with attractive people - Not just based on looks; people with looks just may have more confidence - All about how you look and present yourself - Especially with TV; must be attractive for those jobs - Depends on job; want to be a reporter - yes	factor when you have attractive and unattractive person with same qualifications - Yes; personal story – manager only wanted apps from attractive girls - Not about being attractive; more about being presentable - Depends on industry you work in	no - Yes, to some degree; people more likely to hire attractive people - About how you present yourself; dress nicely and chances of getting job are better
B.) Happiness - Yes, prettier is more accepted in society - Looks = confidence which ultimately = happiness - If beauty is a priority for someone then it is required for happiness - Happiness and beauty are related ('how often do girls say I look like crap, but I'm happy') - Putting more time into your appearance = better mood	B.) Happiness - Yes** - No** - Own view of if your beautiful or not = happiness; if you focus on trying be beautiful instead of acceptance, you're not as happy	B.) Happiness - No - Outer beauty not necessary, but inner beauty is - Confidence is more so related to happiness; that's all you need
C.) Popularity - Important in middle and high school; not	C.) Popularity - No; depends more on personality	C.) Popularity - No (some popular people in high school

"now"* - No, personality is more important - Definition of popularity changes with age; as you get older is more about personality	- Girls may flock to a guy who's attractive and then get to know him and he becomes less popular [???]	weren't beautiful) - Depends; met people who are attractive and were popular in H.S. and have met people who were just confident but were popular - People may not be popular to everyone, but may be in their circle of friends [???]
D.) Romance - Important for your partner to find you attractive - In relationships, you ultimately need more than just beauty** - Most be comfy with your body in order to be on physical level with your partner	D.) Romance - Yes, but based on your own view and definition of beauty - Must have confidence and be comfy in your own skin for success with romance; insecurities cause jealousy in relationships - Attractiveness has something to do with it initially; then you build upon it	D.) Romance - Not really; people who may not be attractive to others is attractive to someone - Personality more important than beauty

b.) Post-stimulus

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
A.) Career - Yes - Betty didn't get job because she was ugly - Textbook says must look nice in order to get job - Important in sales*; people won't buy things from ugly people - Yes, because you're representing the company	A.) Career - Yes - Yes; must sell yourself first	A.) Career - Depends on your goals - Not important, but couldn't hurt

- Don't have to be gorgeous to make yourself presentable for a job		
B.) Happiness - No; Betty seems happy - Betty is happy because of home environment (not based on clip) - Happiness more so about acceptance - Based on who you surround yourself with (not with people who judge you after meeting you) - Pretty people can be very unhappy**;they have to try hard all the time to be beautiful - Happiness = being happy with yourself inside and out	**B.) Happiness** - Yes - Important for personal happiness - Your own perception of beauty = happiness	**B.) Happiness** - No; beautiful people are sometimes more unhappy* - People who aren't as pretty find other ways to prove themselves; builds confidence
C.) Popularity - Once you get in real world, there's no such thing as popularity - When you become mature, popularity is more about personality - Popularity exist, but not related to beauty	**C.) Popularity** - Yes - In high school; people are critical	**C.) Popularity** - No*** - Overall, yes - People stray towards attractive people; ugly people must work harder - Depends on age - No; popularity based more on personality than on looks
D.) Romance - Yes and no; people attracted to people like them; ugly to ugly and pretty to pretty - As long as person finds their partner attractive (beauty is in the eye of the beholder)	**D.) Romance** - Yes, must be attracted to the person you love*** - Based on the person and their taste	**D.) Romance** - Attractiveness is first thing you see; but mostly about their personality - Everyone in the world is attractive to someone; beauty is in the eye of the beholder

POST VIDEO UB QUESTIONS

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
A.) Seen the show/Thoughts - 6 people seen it - Show is cute but unrealistic - Progressively got unrealistic like other shows - Hard because Betty was made to be ugly - Betty unrealistic because she never catches on to fashion; she's oblivious** - ***Those who haven't seen it, no particular reason why***	A.) Seen the show/Thoughts - # people seen it - Shows cultural definitions of beauty and similarities because of different versions	A.) Seen the show/Thoughts - 4 people seen it - Hilarious; betty is ugly but she makes it work - Good example for people to watch; shows that you don't have to be attractive to be successful
B.) Describe Betty - Nerdy - Smart - Saves the day (not based on clip) - Eager - Persistent* - Thrifty - Doesn't see her differences - Friendly - Outgoing* - Rough to look at - Based on beauty standards she is ugly - Could be much prettier just by going home and fixing herself up - Not naturally ugly; her presentation is ugly***; she is all the stereotypes of ugliness - Oblivious to fashion - ***Society and media would call her ugly***	B.) Describe Betty - Ambitious* - Confident* - Outgoing - No social skills; doesn't pick up on cues others would - Too extroverted - Cute girl with dumb down looks - America (the actress) is beautiful and has broken many barriers with her looks - According to beauty standards, she is ugly** - Unfortunate - May not be confident in appearance but is a go getter - Hard worker which adds to her confidence and personality - Under her clothes, she's gorgeous***	B.) Describe Betty - Passionate - Driven - Full of life - Persistent - Smart - Beautiful based on beauty standards - Beautiful because she has a cute smile and is always happy - Hard to say she is ugly because the actress who plays her is not ugly - Betty's character is goofy and lovable - She has her own style - More relatable

	- "makeover girl" – you see her and think 'she could be really pretty if fixed up'* - People call her ugly because she's not uniform or she isn't wearing fashionable stuff - *Betty isn't confident in looks but is self conscious; comfy with her job and skills*	
C.) Describe the other woman - Snobby - Skinny - Tall - Snark - Pleasing to the eye - Good fashion sense - Stereotypical pretty woman - Dismissive - Based on beauty standards, she is beautiful*** - Outward beauty, inward ugly** - **Rest of society would agree she has outer beauty and ugly inside; looks nice but grumpy; being pretty no excuse** - **Media standards say she is beautiful**	C.) Describe the other woman - Bad attitude*** - Unattractive - Tight hear** - Too much make up - High fashion - Fashionable; looks like an idiot - Has a European style - Not European - Rude; if she was nicer, she'd be more attractive - According to beauty standards she is beautiful***	C.) Describe the other woman - Ugly attitude - Tall - Skinny - Witch - Biotch - Pretty according to beauty standards - She's pretty, but not beautiful; beauty is a package

MAJORS/CLASS

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
- Public Relations - Communication and English - HNFE (2) - Communication (4) - Communication & Biology	- HNFE - Marketing and Management - Communication (3) - Communication & Interdisciplinary Studies	- Economics & Finance - Public Relations - English - Communication (4) - Human Development

- Political Science & Communication - HTM - Spanish and Communication - Marketing Freshmen= 0 Sophomore= 7 Junior= 1 Senior=3 Not Given=2	- Political Science and Communication - Broadcast Journalism - Communication & ITS - Communication & Human Development - Communication & Speech Freshmen= 1 Sophomore= 5 Junior= 2 Senior= 2 Not Given= 1	Freshmen= 0 Sophomore= 3 Junior= 2 Senior= 3 Not Given= 0