

The Beauty Perceptions of Hmong  
American College  
Women

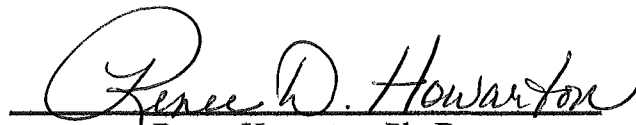
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**ABSTRACT**

There is considerable research regarding body image and beauty perceptions among minority women such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. However, little research has been done on beauty perceptions among women of the Hmong population. The objective of this research was to determine what Hmong-American college women perceive as physical beauty and to identify the most important factors that may influence their perceptions. In order to further an understanding of those factors, a definition of what these females perceive as physical beauty needed to be established and defining this perception was the focus of this study.

An online survey was used to measure the participants' perceptions of physical beauty ideals. This survey was sent to three universities in western Wisconsin; a total of 51 surveys were completed. The survey focused primarily on the participants' own perceptions. Results suggested that Hmong American college women's perceptions of physical beauty are similar to those found in the body of research describing the general Asian American female population. While they chose ideal body shapes that were mid-size and were associated with being healthy,

Western media still appeared to be the most influential factor impacting Hmong American women's perceptions of beauty. Respondents identified Western media, Western celebrities, Asian media, Asian celebrities, and Western culture as being their most important influencing factors while friends and family were less of an influence. However, the extent to which Western media affects Hmong women's perception of beauty is still inconclusive and warrants further investigation.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

The U.S. is often described as a “melting pot” or a “salad bowl” of different ethnicities and cultures. With so many different groups and people, one may expect a plethora of definitions about beauty. But that definition is getting narrower as we, as a country, have simply come to accept one prototype as attractive: tall, thin, blonde hair, blue eyes, and large breasts (Lee, 2005; Chan, 2007). Young women try to reach this standard of beauty and they often times fail because for many, it is an unrealistic and unattainable desire. However, not only is this western ideal of beauty emulated by White women, it is also becoming a desired beauty standard for many minority women as well. Coming from various subcultures in the U.S., many minority women, especially Asian women, desire to create an image that is representative of what they see in the mainstream culture (Chan, 2007).

A theory that is often used to explain body dissatisfaction among women is the social comparison theory. This theory proposes the idea that every human being has a need to evaluate his or her skills and abilities with others who are similar to them. Another concept of this theory explains that humans also have a drive to improve by comparing themselves to those who are considered to be “better” than they are (Wood, 1989). Social comparison theory has been used in researching minority women and their acceptance of mainstream beauty ideals. The study done by Evans and McConnell (2003) included Asian, Black, and White women. The researchers found that Black women were the least impacted by mainstream beauty ideals and were more likely to compare their own level of attractiveness to other Black women. Asian women, however, were more similar to White women in their responses and considered mainstream beauty ideals to be desirable.

For Asian women, this desire to conform to idealized western features could be the result of many factors. Some research suggests that acculturation into the mainstream culture and racial teasing are serious influential factors. Acculturation into the mainstream culture may have a negative side effect on women's bodies because each culture perceives beauty and body ideals differently and it may be impacted in dramatically different ways. The significant change of one culture's beauty ideals to another may be harmful. "If this change in ideal body image and attractiveness occurs such that the ideal body image becomes unrealistically thin, acculturating women may become more vulnerable to eating disorder symptoms" (Perez, Voelz, Pettit, & Joiner, 2002, p. 443). Acculturation is seen as adopting characteristics of the dominant culture into one's traditional culture and has long been seen as a contributing factor of an acceptance of beauty ideals, but researchers are now debating whether there really is a relationship at all.

Acculturation is a broadly used term and has many components to it. It has been suggested that defining acculturation as one element may not be accurate. It is not possible to find the degree of acculturation of individuals because there are so many components that make up the phenomenon of acculturation (Kawamura, 2004). A factor that may have a stronger relationship is racial teasing. Researchers have suggested that years of being teased about an individual's physical ethnic attributes could lead to that individual accepting the ideals of the dominant culture over traditional ones (Iyer & Haslam, 2003). The racial physical characteristics of many Asians include a broad nose and an epicanthic eye fold – these features are far from the idealized images of a narrow nose and large eyes. The idealization of these images has led many Asian women to pursue plastic surgery such as double eye-lid surgery and nasal implants (Kawamura, 2004; Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999).

The mainstream beauty ideals in the U.S. have definitely impacted how Asian American women perceive beauty. But the extent of acceptance of this mainstream beauty ideal is still unknown for groups that are fairly new to the United States, such as the Hmong. The Hmong are an Asian subgroup that has been making the United States their home for the past 30 years. They are a refugee group that has been immigrating to America since their involvement with the U.S. in the Vietnam War. Since then, there have been about three generations of Hmong in the U.S (Tatman, 2004). Some have adopted parts of the mainstream culture into their everyday lives, while others still maintain many traditional practices. The Hmong community has always strived to assimilate themselves into the mainstream culture, while maintaining their unique cultural heritage.

Although there are many success stories of assimilation, the negative side effects also exist in terms of Hmong women's body image (Lee, 2007). Traditional Hmong beauty ideals include full, rounded women; but this is starting to change in the Hmong community for the younger generation. This can be seen through body alterations that are popular for many Asian subgroups: such as bleaching their hair to make it lighter, wearing colored contact lenses, cutting their hair shorter, and using makeup to make their eyes appear larger (Lee, 2007). Many Hmong girls have even internalized this ideal to the point where they strive to achieve a super thin figure. In Lee's (2007) ethnographic study, she interviewed high school Hmong girls about beauty ideals. Some girls even "discussed their desire to diet down to size zero clothes" (p. 213). Although there hasn't been any research on the rates of eating disorders in the Hmong community, Lee suggested that it "may be a growing issue..." (p. 214).

There are very few studies done about the body images and beauty perceptions of Hmong women. Aside from Lee's (2005; 2007) ethnographic studies about Hmong youths, there were

only two other studies that specifically collected data about Hmong body image and self-esteem. Both of those studies were contradictory in their results; although that could be the result of the age of the subjects studied and the measurement used. In Franzoi and Chang's (2002) study, they observed the body esteem of Hmong American and White college students. They found that Hmong American women had better attitudes about their weight than White women and appeared to have a more positive attitude towards it as well. Although the study showed that Hmong women had a more positive outlook about their weight, the researchers also stated that the valuing of thinness may be on the rise because "Hmong women's body esteem is negatively affected by higher weight levels" (Franzoi & Chang, 2002, p. 90). The second study looked at the food and weight patterns of Hmong adolescents. This study found that Hmong female adolescents were more concerned about their weight than White females, and reported in engaging in unhealthful dieting practices (Stang et al, 2007).

There is definitely a need for more research concerning Hmong American women's body image. Due to the lack of research in this area, information can only be generalized through studies concerning other Asian American women. But the Hmong are a unique Asian subgroup as they are fairly new to the United States, so more specific studies need to be done. While research has shown that many Asian American women are more likely to conform to mainstream beauty ideals, little is known about what Hmong American women actually consider to be physically beautiful. This research will hopefully provide some insight into the factors that contribute to creating beauty and body image ideals among Hmong American women. A definition of what Hmong American women consider to be beautiful is also the basis for this research. Finding these answers can help teachers and counselors to better address body and beauty issues of Hmong women.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The body image of Hmong American college women is an area that has not been widely studied. Although several studies already exist regarding Asian American women's body image perceptions, there is an underlying assumption that their beauty ideals are congruent with that of White women's. While research has shown that Asian women are more likely to conform to mainstream beauty ideals, little is known about what Hmong American women consider as physically beautiful in a woman. In order to do further studies on which contributing factors impact Hmong American women's beauty and body ideals, a definition of physical beauty must first be established.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to identify what Hmong American college women define as physical beauty and to find the most important factors that influence their perceptions. Data will be collected in the form of a survey during fall 2009 at three different universities in western Wisconsin.

### *Research hypotheses*

The following hypotheses were formulated after a literature review on the acceptance of western beauty ideals. These educated guesses are used to guide the research in this thesis.

1. Hmong American college women will be able to recognize and identify mainstream ideals of beauty.
2. Hmong American college women would be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful face.
3. Hmong American college women would be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful body shape.

4. Women who are considered as “in-group” members would have the biggest influence over Hmong American college women’s perception of beauty.

### *Definition of Terms*

The following is a list of terms that will be used throughout this thesis. These definitions will help the reader have a better understanding of how these terms will be used in the context of this thesis.

*Asian American:* “Americans of Asian descent. They include groups such as Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Cambodian/Khmer, Pakistani Americans and others whose national origin is from the Asian continent” (Wikipedia, n.d.).

*Acculturation:* Defined by Perez et al (2002) as, “The assimilation of a different culture to one’s own culture, with the ultimate goal of minimizing the differences between cultures” (p. 442). Kawamura (2004) also defined acculturation as, “The process by which individuals integrate the customs, attitudes, and habits associated with their traditional cultures with those of the dominant culture” (p. 247).

*Body Image:* “Personal evaluations and affective experiences regarding one’s physical attributes and attractiveness” (Perez et al, 2002, p. 443). Lau, Lum, Chronister & Forrest (2006) also defined body image as, “The perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and personality reactions of the individual in relation to his [or her] own body” (p.259).

*Collectivistic:* “Collectivists focus on community and society, and seek to give priority to group goals over individual goals” (Wikipedia, n.d.).

*Individualistic:* “the moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that stresses independence and self-reliance. Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and



desires, while opposing most external interference upon one's choices, whether by society, or any other group or institution” (Wikipedia, n.d.).

*Racial Teasing:* “Teasing is directed at those perceived to be different or disliked and is often lastingly detrimental to the target’s development. It focuses on the target’s ethnically distinctive attributes” (Iyer & Haslam, 2002, p. 143).

*Social Comparison Theory:* “Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory postulates that humans have a drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities... people best serve this need for self-evaluation by measuring their attributes against direct, physical standards” (Wood, 1989, p. 231).

#### *Assumptions of the Study*

The researcher assumes the following:

1. The participants will answer the survey to the best of their knowledge;
2. The participants will answer the survey honestly;
3. The participants only took the survey once;
4. The participants have lived in the United States for a long enough duration that they are able to identify mainstream beauty ideals.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

The findings of this research could be limited to the following:

1. Participants may not be representative of the larger Hmong population;
2. Participants may answer questions in a way that they perceive the researcher is looking for; the data may not reflect their true perceptions or values of beauty;
3. All the survey participants attend a university and may not be representative of other Hmong women due to their level of education;

4. The images used in the survey may not be representative of all mainstream beauty ideals.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature available about the changing beauty ideals of Asian-American women and Hmong women in the U.S. The first section will discuss Social Comparison Theory and how it relates to the research on Asian and Asian-American women's idealization of western beauty ideals. The next section will discuss the factors contributing to the acceptance of western beauty ideals, such as acculturation and racial teasing. The chapter will conclude with information about the Hmong, the acculturation process of the Hmong in America, and the changing beauty ideals of Hmong women.

### *Social Comparison Theory & the Idealization of Western Beauty*

Beauty is an undefined standard that varies between cultures across the world. With a population of over 300 million people in the United States; the definition of beauty is so abstract and vague that it varies, even between subgroups and individuals (U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2009). But the line between individual definitions and cultural acceptance of beauty is getting narrower and narrower with the constant parade of the western ideal: tall, blonde hair, large eyes, long legs, and thinness (Lee, 2005). These images help to perpetuate a one-sided image of beauty that is unattainable to many women, especially women of color. Although much research has been done about the effects of this western ideal on young white women, there are few studies about the experiences of minority women (Poran, 2002; Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999). Of the research that have been done on minority women, Black, Latino, and Asian American women make up that list, and even then, more research is needed to fully understand those experiences. In order to better understand the idealization of western beauty among minority women and to help explain how minority women are impacted by those images, social comparison theory is used.

Social comparison theory is a concept that has been widely used in research concerning body image dissatisfaction. Developed by Festinger in 1954, this theory looks at the idea that “people compare themselves to others when they are not certain about their opinions or qualities, particularly when standards are subjective” (Evans & McConnell, 2003, p. 154). Individuals have a need to evaluate and compare themselves to others so that they know where their skills and performance stands (Wood, 1989). Although people are more likely to compare themselves to in-group members and to others who are similar to them, there are additional ways that people may compare themselves to others. Upward comparison involves comparing oneself to others who perform “better” or are considered to have a “higher status.” This type of comparison is harmful because it could lead to jealousy, competitiveness, and negative feelings towards oneself. Downward comparison involves evaluating oneself to others who appear to perform “worse” (Chung & Mallery, 1999; Poran, 2002).

Evans and McConnell (2003) used social comparison theory to do a study comparing the acceptance of mainstream beauty ideals between Asian, Black, and White women. The researchers predicted that the women would compare themselves to the idealized standards of beauty because social comparison theory states that people tend to compare themselves to others when they aren’t sure of their own level of attractiveness. Evans and McConnell (2003) found that out of the three minority groups, Black women were shown to be the least impacted by White beauty standards. This is theorized to be a result of strong support from the Black community and a valuing for fuller figures (Poran, 2002). Evans and McConnell (2003) noted that “members of stigmatized groups may adopt certain strategies for self-protection under potentially threatening events” (p. 154). Some of those strategies may be to compare themselves to those who are similar to them rather than comparing themselves to the idealized beauty

standard. When each group rated how much they would desire to look Asian, Black, or White by use of yearbook photos, Black women viewed women outside of their in-group as less desirable in terms of beauty. They were more likely than Asian and White women to compare their own level of attractiveness to only members of their in-group. In response to the valuing culture of thinness, Black women have developed a shield to protect themselves from mainstream body pressures by perceiving only in-group members as relevant comparisons. Black women appear to not be strongly affected by idealized western ideals and have even displayed higher levels of self-esteem and body satisfaction than White women (Evans & McConnell, 2003).

On the other hand, Asian women were more likely than Black women to find the mainstream standard of beauty as desirable while White women were rated the most likely to find the mainstream beauty as desirable. Overall, Evans and McConnell (2003) found that Asian women were very similar to White women in their desire to take on mainstream standards of beauty. One factor for this could be their need for conformity. Evans and McConnell (2003) used a scale to measure how important it was for participants to conform to norms. On this scale, Asian women scored higher than Black and White women in their desire to conform to cultural standards, "Asians may believe in an interdependence between the self and the dominant culture. Thus, they should attempt to conform to the standards prescribed by mainstream culture" (Evans & McConnell, 2003, p. 163). This need to conform to the mainstream standard of beauty may be harmful to Asian women because the physical racial features of Asian women are vastly different from that of the white standard. Internalization of this standard of beauty could be an explanation for the high rates of Asian women pursuing cosmetic surgeries; which is discussed later in this chapter.

### *The Changing Beauty Ideal of Asian American Women*

Discussing the Asian or Asian-American experience in America is nearly impossible because of all the many different ethnic groups that make up this population. Each ethnic group is diverse in their culture, language, history, religion, and traditions. Due to these cultural disparities, each ethnic group acculturates differently and at different rates.

Although each ethnic Asian group is unique and different, there are similar traits between them that may explain an acceptance of western beauty ideals (Chan, 2007). Kawamura (2004) wrote, “there also exist similarities in terms of traditional cultural values, physical appearance (which may differ from Western notions of beauty), and status as an ethnic minority group” (p. 243). Those common traditional values, such as collectivism, could have an impact on individuals’ body image. Chung and Mallery (1999) describes the differences of a collectivistic and an individualistic culture along a continuum of how “people relate to others in the environment” (p. 2). Collectivistic cultures promote the larger group before the individual and could therefore have an effect on their perceptions of body image. Chung and Mallery (1999) did a study about social comparison theory and the self-esteem in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. They found that collectivistic individuals tended to make upward comparisons with a desire to improve themselves for the sake of their group. Thus, it can be theorized that individuals in collectivistic ethnic Asian groups may desire to maintain an acceptable physical appearance because they are representative of their group.

The attempts to fit into what popular culture deems as beautiful has many negative side effects for Asian American women who reach for an unattainable body image; often resulting in body alterations, dieting, and low self-esteem (Eating Disorders, n.d.). Many Asian women idealize the western features they see in the media and attempt to look western by getting plastic

surgery. The use of plastic surgery to alter one's looks is a popular idea for many Asian Americans. "According to the 2004 American Society of Plastic Surgeons reports, Asian Americans were more likely to pursue cosmetic surgery than any other ethnic group" (Chan, 2007, p.11). Whereas, the plastic surgery of choice for many White women is breast enlargements and liposuction, Asian women are more likely to have cosmetic surgery which alters their physical Asian features (Chan, 2007). It is not uncommon for Asian women to request double eyelid surgery to create an eye-fold and to have nasal implants to create a narrower nose; which is representative of the western beauty of double eyelids and a defined, sculpted nose (Kawamura, 2004; Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999). These procedures significantly change the facial features that are specific to many Asians, such as a slanted epicanthic eye fold and a flat or broad nose (Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999). Chan (2007) explains that a motivation behind changing one's racially-defined physical features to more westernized features could be to reduce the stigma that comes with being a minority, "... ethnic cosmetic surgery may be perceived not only as a beautification technique, but also as an attempt to transcend racial status and achieve power" (p. 12-13).

Not wanting or not being able to take drastic measures to change their facial features through plastic surgery, has forced many Asian women to focus on their weight because it is something that they can control (Haynie, 2007). There are few studies about Asian women and eating disorders. Of those studies that exist, there has been contradicting research about the weight concerns, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorders of Asian women. (Tsai, Hoerr, & Song, 1998). In a study done by Ogden and Elder (1998), they found that Asian daughters had lower levels of calorie concerns and higher body satisfaction; which they attributed to the Asian daughters not identifying with the white models in the media. In Mintz & Kashubeck's study of

Asian American and Caucasian college students' body image and various disordered eating variables, they found that Asian American women reported less dieting and bingeing behaviors in comparison to Caucasian women. The study also found that Asian American women were more likely to be dissatisfied by body parts that they could not easily change through dieting; such as their face, eyes, breasts, arms, and height (1999).

In contrast, a pilot study about the dieting behaviors of Asian college women reported that, "some Asian college women have dysfunctional dieting behaviors and body dissatisfaction levels similar to those of their American counterparts" (Tsai, et al, 1998, n.p.). Cummins and Lehman (2007) explained that contradicting information about Asian women and eating disorders could be due to the diagnosis and criteria (which are based off of western patients) that were used to assess Asian women. "Researchers have suggested that this misuse of Western-based criteria sets has contributed to misleading findings when prevalence rates of eating disorders are studied in non-White populations" (p. 220).

Since Asian women tend to have smaller frames and smaller body-mass indexes than Caucasian women, they are often stereotyped as being naturally small and thin (Chan, 2007). These stereotypes can lead to assumptions that Asian women do not have eating disorders and can perpetuate the desire for Asian women to maintain a thin body size, which is idealized in mainstream beauty standards. In reality, women and girls from all different ethnic populations are just as vulnerable to eating disorders and weight concerns; the problem is that it is often not reported. "Studies typically do not include ethnically diverse populations; therefore, cases of eating disorders among racial ethnic groups, including Asian Americans, are often underreported" (Eating Disorders, n.d., n.p.). In addition, due to cultural norms and traditional



views regarding mental health problems, Asian American women are less likely to seek out any sort of help if they have body image issue (Lau et al, 2006).

Traditionally, many Asian cultures viewed rounded or even obese figures as more beautiful because it signified health and prosperity. The shift in attitudes from traditional beauty ideals to western ones are seen as the result of many factors, but research has shown that acculturation and racial teasing may be two contributing factors (Perez et al, 2002).

#### *Acculturation is a Debated Factor*

Acculturation was listed as another factor for acceptance of western beauty ideals, but there appears to be a large debate about whether or not there really is a relationship. In Kawamura's (2004) article, she defined acculturation as, "the process by which individuals integrate the customs, attitudes, and habits associated with their traditional cultures with those of the dominant culture" (p. 247). Although many researchers have stated this as a factor, others have reported no relationship. Kawamura explained that acculturation is a broad phenomenon with so many dimensions that it is impossible to measure each dimension on their level of influence on Asian girls' acceptance of western beauty ideals. She proposed for more research to be done on each component of acculturation rather than defining acculturation as one main idea. (Kawamura, 2004; Petrie, Tripp & Harvey, 2002).

In contrast, Perez et al (2002) defined acculturation as "the assimilation of a different culture to one's own culture, with the ultimate goals of minimizing the differences between cultures" (p. 442). In their article, they discussed the body schema theory as part of the acculturation process. This theory proposed that people will change their physical appearance to match that of the mainstream culture. Even though each culture has its own unique ideas about beauty, individuals who acculturate to that new culture may be more likely to conform to those

new beauty standards. “If this change in ideal body image and attractiveness occurs such that the ideal body image becomes unrealistically thin, acculturating women may become more vulnerable to eating disorder symptoms” (Perez, et al, 2002, p. 443). Perez, et al also cited research about Hispanic women in their article to support their idea. The research stated that Hispanic women who were not acculturated into the mainstream culture were more likely to select a larger body figure as their ideal, than the Hispanic women who were acculturated. Although the research they cited was consistent with their ideas about acculturation, there is no real way to measure how “acculturated” an individual is; and this was also listed as one of the limitations in their article. More research on the components of acculturation and its degree of influence on women’s body images needs to be established before stating this as a factor of acceptance of western beauty ideals.

#### *The Effects of Racial Teasing and Racism*

Other research has suggested a stronger relationship between racial teasing and an adherence to mainstream standards. Racial teasing is defined as teasing that is aimed at an individual’s unique physical, racial features. In Iyer and Haslam’s 2003 article, they stated:

By drawing hurtful attention to their ethnically distinctive features, racial teasing might lead minority women to adopt the beauty norms of the dominant culture, disidentify with their host culture, and experience identity problems, distress, and self-denigration, thereby promoting eating and body image disturbance. (p. 143)

The features of Asians and Asian Americans are so distinct from those of the dominant culture that many White Americans continue to perceive them as “forever foreigners” or non-American; even though many were born and raised in the U.S. By always being viewed as an outsider, many young Asian Americans are conflicted about how to construct their identities

(Lee & Vaught, 2003). A hypothesis is that the effect of years of racial teasing and experiences with racism could manifest itself to “internalized racism – the self-loathing of one’s own racial characteristics – whereas Caucasian characteristics become equated with respect, acceptance, and self-esteem” (Kawamura, 2004, p. 246). Years of racism and being teased about racial attributes could lead to individuals being dissatisfied with their physical features. A study found that Asian American youths who were dissatisfied with how they looked would rather choose Caucasian features over their own if they had a choice (Kawamura, 2004). In comparison to acculturation, racial teasing appears to have a stronger relationship. Iyer and Haslam (2003) suggested that racial teasing is an even bigger factor in body disturbances among minority women, but that it is a factor that is often not researched. Because the teasing is a response by the dominant culture towards the individual, an acceptance of western beauty ideals may not be caused by the individual’s desire to acculturate but rather their reaction towards the racism.

### *The Hmong in America*

The struggle between two different cultures is something that many Hmong women have dealt with all their lives. It is a balancing act of doing what is culturally acceptable and practicing the norms of the mainstream society. The main struggle is finding the right balance between being a Hmong woman and being an Americanized woman. Some consider the definitions of both of these terms as opposites of one another; black and white. But for many Hmong women who have grown up in the United States, life is always in shades of grey. This struggle to find an identity between two cultures is also exacerbated by the constant portrayal of western ideals of beauty. With a desire to be accepted into mainstream culture, first and second generation Hmong women are vulnerable to the mainstream standards of beauty (Lee & Vaught, 2003).

### *History of the Hmong*

The Hmong are an ethnic Asian group that originated in China and migrated to the mountains of Laos. Up until the Vietnam War, the Hmong lived a primarily agrarian lifestyle away from contemporary culture. During the Vietnam War, the C.I.A. recruited Hmong men and boys to help them fight against communism in Laos, promising them safety if the U.S. lost the war (Lee, 2005). The war had devastating results; thousands of Hmong soldiers died fighting for the U.S. In the end, the U.S. lost the Vietnam War and the Hmong were forced to leave their country due to retaliation from the communist Pathet Lao army. The Hmong journeyed to Thailand where they sought refuge, where several years later, the U.S. finally fulfilled their promise and allowed the Hmong to immigrate to the United States (Tatman, 2004). Today, there are over 170,000 Hmong in the U.S. (*Hmong Population Research Project*, 2000).

### *The Changing Ideal of Hmong Beauty*

Beauty is an undefined standard that varies between cultures across the world. It is also so abstract and vague that it varies, even between subgroups and individuals. Even in the Hmong culture, beauty has changed over time. The traditional standard of beauty in Laos valued full-figured and rounded women because “of the associations between fecundity and roundness” (Lee, 2007, p. 214). The Hmong have been living in the U.S. for over 25 years now and although the group has maintained many of its original cultural practices, the effects of mainstream American culture is clearly evident in Hmong youth.

Many young Hmong women in the U.S. are straying from the traditional Hmong beauty ideals of full-figured women to the thin, blonde western beauty ideals. As described by many older Hmong women, what was considered beautiful back then is not considered beautiful in today’s standards. There is a large gap between the older generation Hmong women and Hmong

youths, as both have very different ideas about what is considered beautiful. Older Hmong women describe the days when plumper figures, light skin, long thick black hair, and wider hips were the ideal beauty standards (Lee, 2007). Nowadays, the current beauty standards can be seen by almost every Hmong American girl. From clothing and makeup, to dieting; it is apparent that mainstream beauty ideals have affected today's Hmong girls. This is evident in Lee's 2005 ethnographic study on the Hmong in which Lee describes her surprise at discovering the weight concerns of Hmong girls:

While Zer typically dressed in hip-hop-style clothes, she also aspired to and had internalized a standard of extreme thinness associated with the White middle-class gender aesthetic. Prior to hearing Zer talk about dieting, I had mistakenly assumed that young Hmong women at UHS were largely unconcerned with their weight...most surprisingly was Zer's assertion that many Hmong parents value thinness in women because they recognize that thin women are valued in the dominant U.S. culture. (Lee, 2005, p. 112)

In Lee and Vaught's (2003) research with Hmong girls, they wrote about the desire of Hmong girls to fit in with their American peers, "The Hmong American high school girls explicitly and consistently expressed their belief that not being White prevented them from being accepted as authentic Americans" (p. 459). Wearing name brand clothing, listening to popular music, and talking in an "Americanized" manner are attempts to be accepted. This desire to be seen as part of the mainstream culture has led some girls to stray away from those who embody traditional Hmong standards of beauty, such as recent Hmong arrivals.

With the recent wave of new Hmong refugees to the U.S. within the last six years, the cultural differences are much more apparent. Many of the recent Hmong immigrants are from Wat Tham Krabok, which was a makeshift community of Hmong refugees in Thailand. This

community closed in the mid 2000's. Finally, 30 years after the Vietnam War, this final wave of Hmong refugees have slowly made their way into the U.S. (Long Wait is Over, 2004). As these recent Hmong refugees adjust to life in America, the shift from traditional cultural ideals to western ideals can be observed in more established Hmong inhabitants versus newer arrivals.

Although part of the same cultural heritage, Hmong youths often label themselves as either Hmong-American or Hmong-Thai, thus differentiating themselves in terms of the mainstream culture they were raised in. This creates an artificial boundary between both groups and distances both groups from one another. This is evident in a quote given in Lee and Vaught's (2003) article, where a second generation Hmong girl described her dislike of the new Hmong refugees because of their "out of date" clothing styles. She further differentiated herself from the newcomers by labeling them as "FOBS" (Fresh off boat), which is a derogatory term.

Inherent in this student's disparaging description of recent immigrants...is a condemnation of anything foreign, but also a rejection of the "forever foreigner" status imposed on her and other Asian Americans. However, by rejecting the image of Asian Americans as "forever foreigners," she is simultaneously partially internalizing a racist discourse about Asians and Asian Americans. (Lee & Vaught, 2003, p. 459)

With only a few years in the U.S., it is unknown whether the body images of those recently arrived Hmong girls have changed to more western ones, or whether they have stayed the same. But the effects on Americanized Hmong women appear to be evident with the use of makeup, colored contacts, the process of dyeing and bleaching hair, as well as having short hair styles. Lee (2005) mentions that these beauty alterations are very common in many other Asian American women as well.

### *Research on Hmong Women's Body Image*

There is limited research that focuses mainly on the body and beauty perceptions of Hmong women. In fact, one of the only studies done concerning Hmong body image was done by Franzoi and Chang (2002). This study looked at the race and gender differences in body esteem between 73 Hmong American and 80 White college students. Results of the study showed that Hmong women tended to have better attitudes regarding weight than White women. But, "Hmong women's body esteem is negatively affected by higher weight levels" (Franzoi & Chang, 2002, p. 90). Franzoi and Chang suggest that although Hmong women appeared to have a more positive attitude towards their weight, the acceptance of western thinness may be on the rise because the Hmong women who do have a higher body mass appear to have more weight concerns and have more negative body esteem. Traditional Hmong and Asian beauty "do not emphasize feminine thinness," so this finding suggests that mainstream beauty images may have an effect upon Hmong women (p. 91).

In contrast, another research looked at the food and weight patterns of Hmong adolescents and found that Hmong female adolescents were more concerned about their weight and had less body satisfaction than their White counterparts. In this study of 649 Hmong students, 53% were female. Out of the Hmong females who participated, 70.5% "reported engaging in unhealthful dieting practices, such as fasting, skipping meals, or smoking, to lose weight" (Stang et al, 2007, p. 939). The differences in results from both studies about the body and weight satisfaction among Hmong females, suggests that more research needs to be done in this area.

Due to the lack of research about Hmong women and their body ideals, information can only be generalized based on a handful of studies that investigate the body ideals of Asian

American women. Since research involving Asians includes a broad range of different cultures, it is difficult to apply such generalized information to one specific Hmong population. The body image perceptions of Asian American women are frequently based on an underlying assumption that this particular population has beauty ideals that are congruent with those of Caucasian females. While research has shown that many Asian American women are more likely to conform to mainstream beauty ideals, little is known about how Hmong American women define and perceive physical beauty. In order to further an understanding of those factors that contribute to creating beauty and body image ideals among Hmong American women, a definition of Hmong beauty must be established; which is the basis for this research.



### Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methodology used in this study. A description of the sample and subject selection will be followed by a description of the instrument used. In addition, the procedures and data collection process will also be given along with the data analyses. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the methodological limitations.

The purpose of this study was to investigate what Hmong American college women define as physical beauty and to determine the most important factors that influence their perceptions of it.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

Subjects are Hmong American women currently enrolled in a university in western Wisconsin and who are over the age of 18 as of November 2009. These women will be either first or second-generation Hmong women. A list of Hmong American college students was generated through the Hmong or Asian organization at each participating university and was sent to each of the organization's distribution lists by their respective board members or advisors. Although the distribution lists of the organizations included males and females, the email and the survey stated very clearly that only female participants should take the survey and male members of the organization should ignore the email and survey entirely. The survey was sent to 3 different organizations: UW-Stout's Hmong Stout Student Organization (HSSO), UW-Eau Claire's Hmong Student Association (HSA), and UW-River Falls' Asian American Student Association (AASA).

#### *Instrumentation*

The instrumentation used is in the form of an online survey that was created and edited using Qualtrics, an online survey tool that is provided through the University of Wisconsin-

Stout. This survey consisted of quantitative and qualitative questions, and asked the participants to describe their perception of beauty by identifying pictures of faces and body types on a gradient scale. Participants were also asked to answer open-ended questions to describe their personal definitions of beauty. A copy of the survey can be found under Appendix A.

Section I of the survey began with qualitative questions that asks the participant to define what they think is beautiful as well as how they define the mainstream standard of beauty. The purpose of this first section was to help the researcher understand how the participants compared their own perception of beauty with what they think Americans consider as beautiful.

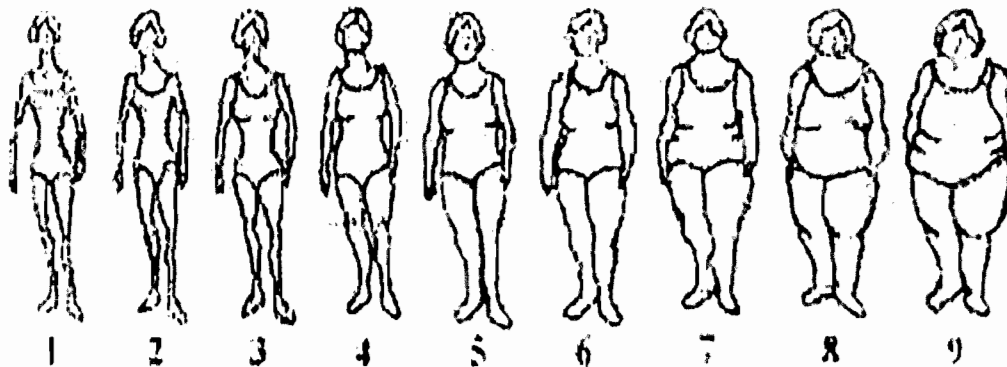
Section II of the survey included questions asking the participant to select pictures of faces and body types that they considered as most ideal and therefore most beautiful. The first gradient scale of pictures used contains a singular face that begins with Caucasian features and changes to resemble more African American and then Asian features as the gradient scale continues. This collection of facial portraits was found using a Google online search.

*Figure 1. Facial Portraits*



The second gradient scale of pictures is a 9-point spectrum that ranges from a very thin body model and continues to a much more obese body model. The pictures are numbered, but are not labeled so as to reduce influencing the participants' choice. The body scale picture was found using a Google online search.

*Figure 2. Body Shape Scale*



The last portion of Section II, utilized qualitative questions and asked participants to explain why they chose the specific face and body shape. This is used to get a better understanding of why the participants chose certain pictures over others.

Section III consisted of questions that will ask the participant to rank how influential specific factors were in determining their personal perception of physical beauty (such as western media, friends, siblings, etc.). The twelve influential factors that are used in the survey are based upon previous research on Asian women's body image, acculturation, and through previous discussions with Hmong American women. This ranking of factors will help us understand what influences Hmong women in their beauty ideals and to help further research.

Section IV concludes the survey with demographic questions that asks the participant to identify personal information such as their age, the institution they are attending, their cultural background, the number of years they have lived in the U.S., what country they were born in, and whether or not they have children.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

A few weeks before distributing the survey, the researcher contacted the respective advisor(s) and the board members of each participating student organization to discuss the purpose of the thesis and the survey. Organizations that were willing to participate in the study were sent an email containing an invitation to take the survey and the survey link. This email was then forwarded to all the female members in the organizations. In addition, the researcher also attended an organizational meeting at UW-Stout and UW-Eau Claire to discuss and promote the survey to its female members.

The email received by the students included information about the purpose of the research, consent notification (see Appendix C), and the survey link:

[http://uwstout.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV\\_aaEZouP93WROK0I&SVID=Prod](http://uwstout.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_aaEZouP93WROK0I&SVID=Prod). The email specified for only Hmong women over the age of 18 and who were attending a university to take the survey. A copy of this email can be found in Appendix D. Participation in this survey was completely voluntary as was explained in the email. Female students were given one week to complete the survey. To help attain the goal of 50 responses, a second invitation email was sent out half way through the week to remind students of the survey. Data was collected in the form of an online survey during the fall 2009 semester.

### *Data Analysis*

The survey was sent to three different Hmong organizations at UW-Stout, UW-Eau Claire, and UW-River Falls. Each organization contained approximately 30 members, with an equal proportion of males and females. The survey was sent specifically to the Hmong female members of those organizations. The researcher anticipated 50 total responses. Out of the 67 surveys that were started, 51 total surveys were completed. After the survey was officially

closed, the data was calculated through Qualtrics, the online survey tool provided through UW-Stout. Open ended questions on the survey were coded. There were two coders to ensure accuracy of results: the researcher and a second coder. Results were compared and a consensus of code words was then used for analysis.

### *Limitations*

The findings of this research could be limited by the following:

1. While the participants are representative of their specific population, the data cannot be generalized to all Asian American cultures or the larger American culture;
2. Because the participants are all college-aged women, the data cannot be generalized to all Hmong-American women due to differences in education and personal experiences;
3. The images of faces used in the survey may not have been a wide enough selection for participants to choose from relative to their individual perceptions of facial beauty;
4. The gradient body image ranking may not have been completely representative of Asian or Hmong body types. They may have appeared to be more representative of bodies of Caucasian women, therefore it may have skewed how participants answered the questions;
5. The participants may answer questions in a way that they perceive the researcher is looking for; therefore the data may not reflect their true perceptions or values of physical beauty.

## Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to identify beauty perceptions of Hmong American college women and to gain greater understanding of the factors that contribute to creating beauty and body image ideals existing among Hmong American women. This was done through the use of an online survey that was distributed during fall 2009 to three Asian/Hmong college organizations at three universities in western Wisconsin: UW-Stout, UW-Eau Claire, and UW-River Falls. This chapter reports the results of that study. A discussion about the findings of the study as well as suggestions for future research will follow in the subsequent chapter.

This chapter will provide demographic information about the participants who took part in the survey. In addition, it will also address the research hypotheses of this survey. The following hypotheses were formulated after a literature review on the acceptance of mainstream beauty ideals. These educated guesses are used to guide the research in this thesis.

1. Hmong American college women will be able to recognize and identify mainstream ideals of beauty.
2. Hmong American college women will be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful face.
3. Hmong American college women will be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful body shape.
4. Women who are considered as “in-group” members will have the biggest influence over Hmong American college women’s perception of beauty.

### *Demographic Information*

An invitation email including a link to the online survey was sent to three Asian/Hmong organizations at three Midwestern universities. There are approximately 30-40 total members in

each organization; with an equal ratio of males and females. The email was sent specifically to the Hmong females of those organizations. The number of responses to the survey was projected for 50. Out of the 67 surveys that were started, 51 total surveys were completed.

The participants are all Hmong American females who currently attend UW-Stout, UW-Eau Claire, or UW-River Falls. Almost twelve percent of the participants noted that they attended UW-River Falls, 35.3% attended UW-Eau Claire, and 52.9% attended UW-Stout. The participants' age ranged from eighteen to twenty six years of age, with a mean age of 20.2 years, a mode of 18 years, and a median age of 20 years.

Table 1

*Age of Participants*

Age	Total Respondents (n=51)	Percent of Total Responses
18	13	25.5%
19	8	15.7%
20	12	23.5%
21	8	15.7%
22	2	3.9%
23	4	7.8%
24	0	0.0%
25	2	3.9%
26	2	3.9%

The participants reported their marital status by identifying whether they were single, married, divorced, or widowed. Forty-six of the participants (90%) reported that they were

single; five of the participants (10%) reported that they were married, and none of the participants reported they were divorced or widowed.

Table 2

*Marital Status of Participants*

Marital Status	Total Respondents (n=51)	Percent of Total Responses
Single	46	90.0%
Married	5	10.0%
Divorced	0	0.0%
Widowed	0	0.0%

The participants also identified whether they had children or not. Four participants (8%) reported having children while 47 participants (92%) reported that they did not have any children.

Table 3

*Number of Participants Who Have Children*

Have Children	Total Respondents (n=51)	Percent of Total Responses
Yes	4	8.0%
No	47	92.0%

The participants also identified the country they were born in as well as the number of years they have lived in the United States. Thirty-seven participants (73%) reported that they



were born in the United States, 14 participants (27%) reported that they were born in Thailand, and no participants were born in Laos or in any other country.

Table 4

*Country Participants Were Born In*

Country	Total Respondents (n=51)	Percent of Total Responses
United States	37	73%
Thailand	14	27%
Laos	0	0.0%
Other	0	0.0%

The average number of years that the participants reported living in the United States was 19.4 years, with a median of 19 years, and a mode of 18 years. Two percent of the total responses reported living in the United States for 0-5 years, 0% reported 6-11 years, 13.7% reported 12-17 years, 76.5% reported 18-23 years, and 7.8% reported 24-29 years.

Table 5

*Years Participants Have Lived in the United States*

Number of Years	Total Respondents (n=51)	Percent of Total Responses
0-5 years	1	2.0%
6-11 years	0	0.0%
12-17 years	7	13.7%
18-23 years	39	76.5%
24-29 years	4	7.8%

The first question in the survey asked the participants to describe what they considered as beautiful in a woman. This question was used to identify how the participants viewed beauty and to determine if the answers were similar to one another. There were a total of 52 responses to this question. The responses were analyzed and coded into eight different categories: personality, confidence, style/clothes/makeup, education, generosity/kindness, physical beauty, inner beauty, and other. A tally mark was used under each category in which the response matched. The coding for all of the qualitative questions was done by both the researcher and a second coder.

Table 6

*What Do You Consider as Beautiful in a Woman?*

Categories	Total Tally Marks (n=94)	Percent of Total Tally Marks
Confidence	21	22.3%
Physical Beauty	17	18.1%
Generosity/kindness	15	16.0%
Personality	13	13.8%
Inner Beauty	10	10.6%
Education	7	7.5%
Other	6	6.4%
Style/clothes/makeup	5	5.3%

The responses that were tallied into the category of “Confidence” included words and descriptions such as: had confidence, self-confident, how they carry themselves, and being courageous. A sample response is, “A person who is confident with the way she looks and feels. Not having doubts about who they are.” This category had 21 tally marks (22.3%) and had the

highest responses. Responses to the next category, “Physical beauty” included answers with descriptions of outer/physical features such as being thin, having large breasts, being tall, eyes, and nose. This category also included responses with descriptions such as “being physically beautiful” and “how she looks.” This category had the second highest tally marks with a total of 17. Responses to the third category, “Generosity/kindness” included key descriptions such as: open-hearted, having a heart of gold, respects others, cares for others, and being compassionate. A sample response in this category is, “Beautiful in a woman through my eyes means be [sic] pretty on the outside, but also having a good heart and good qualities as a person on the inside.”

The “Personality” category included those responses that used the word personality. This category was very straight-forward and had the fourth highest tally marks. Responses to the “Inner beauty” category had responses such as “being true to oneself” and “having beauty that comes from within.” This category had a total of ten tally marks (10.6%). The “Education” category included all the responses which listed being intelligent and having an education as being important. A sample response is, “Highly educated, respectful, recognize right from wrong, open hearted and mature.” Responses that were put into the “Other” category were answers that did not fit into any category or were too vague, such as “loved by many,” “her self-conduct,” “good hygiene” and “someone out of the original.” The last category was “Style/clothes/makeup” which included responses with descriptions regarding a person’s dress and appearance. A sample response to this category includes, “By saying physically beautiful, it doesn't mean they have to be skinny, as long as they have style and know how to dress themselves and utilize make-up well. They wouldn't need to use make-up to make them beautiful, but it helps.” This category had a total of five tally marks or 5.3% of the total responses.

### *Research Hypotheses*

There were four research hypotheses addressed in this study. This chapter will address those research hypotheses. Question two will address research hypothesis 1, question three and four will address hypothesis 2, questions five and six will address hypothesis 3, and question seven will address hypothesis 4.

*Research Hypothesis 1: Hmong American college women will be able to recognize and identify mainstream ideals of beauty.*

In the survey, question three asked participants to define what they think the predominant standard of beauty is in the United States. This question was used as a control to determine if the participants were able to identify the mainstream standard of beauty and if they were consistent in their responses. After reading all the answers, the participants' responses were coded into nine main categories: skinny, tall, style/fashion/makeup, facial features, skin, model type, hair, body, and other. Out of 118 tally marks, the categories skinny and tall had the most marks. Being skinny had 31 tally marks (26.3%) and being tall had a total of 22 tally marks (18.6%).

Table 7

*What Do You Think is the Predominant Standard of Beauty in the U.S.?*

Categories	Total Tally Marks (n=118)	Percent of Total Tally Marks
Skinny	31	26.3%
Tall	22	18.6%
Hair	14	11.9%
Facial features	12	10.2%
Skin	9	7.6%
Body	9	7.6%
Style/fashion/makeup	8	6.8%
Other	7	5.9%
Model type	6	5.1%

Responses with the words skinny, thin and slim were categorized under the category of “Skinny.” A sample of a given response was, “I think the predominant standard of beauty is that you have to be skinny, very pretty and tall.” This response was given tally marks underneath the categories of “Skinny” and “Tall.” All responses with the word “tall” were categorized under “Tall.” For the “Hair” category, the researcher took note of all the responses that mentioned hair. Of the 14 total tally marks for “Hair,” having Blonde hair was mentioned six times. Other hair responses included having beautiful, voluptuous, and nice hair. For the “Facial features” category, the researcher also took note of all the facial features mentioned. The facial features cited were big eyes, full lips, and a thin nose. In this category, there were a total of 12 tally marks; having big eyes was mentioned the most. Several responses included all three facial

features but only one tally mark was used under the category of “Facial features.” A sample response was, “I think the ideal American beauty is tall and skinny with blond hair and blue eyes, a small lip, and a tiny nose.”

For the “Skin” category, responses included words such as perfect skin, clear-skin, and blemish-free skin. There were a total of nine tally marks. For the “Body” category, responses included body parts such as chest, buttocks, waist; and description words such as hour-glass and curviness. Several responses included more than one body part but only one tally mark was used under the “Body” category. This category had a total of nine tally marks. The category of “Style/fashion/makeup” included many key phrases such as: dressing nicely, wearing makeup, having good fashion, wearing popular clothing, and being well dressed. There were a total of eight tally marks for this category. The “Other” category included response that were indefinable or included non-physical descriptions such as: “the people & environment you’re in,” “being strong, powerful, and confident,” “freedom of education, decision, and lifestyle”, or if the responses included vague wording such as “how she looks.” There were a total of seven tally marks that were under this category. The last category was titled “Model type” and tally marks under this category included responses that incorporated the word “model” or had description words which explained how models looked like. A sample response for this category was, “The models on the billboards, or in magazines that I see when I’m checking out at the grocery store. If they don’t look like those girls then they are not ‘beautiful’.” There were a total of six responses for this category.

*Research Hypothesis 2: Hmong American college women would be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful face.*

In the survey, questions three and four asked participants to pick the face that they would consider as the most “beautiful” and why they chose that face. These questions were used to identify whether the participants would tend to choose the same face and why they chose that specific face. All the faces were picked at least once. The faces that were chosen the most included face #8 with 12 responses and face #10 with ten responses. There were a total of 49 responses to question three.

Table 8

*Which Picture would you Consider as the Most Beautiful?*

Face Number	Total Respondents (n=49)	Percent of Total Responses
1	5	10.0%
2	2	4.0%
3	2	4.0%
4	2	4.0%
5	2	4.0%
6	7	14.0%
7	6	12.0%
8	12	24.0%
9	1	2.0%
10	10	20.0%

Responses to question four “Of the face you chose, why do you consider that face to be the most beautiful?” were coded into ten categories. These categories include: looks like me, facial structure, looked “mixed,” facial parts, hair, skin tone/quality, natural/innocent face, looked “beautiful/pretty”, not sure, and other. There were a total of 76 tally marks.

Table 9

*Why do you Consider that Face to be the Most Beautiful?*

Category	Total Tally Marks (n=76)	Percent of Total Tally Marks
Facial structure	14	18.4%
Facial parts	10	13.2%
Other	10	13.2%
Skin tone/quality	9	11.8%
Looks like me	8	10.5%
Natural/innocent face	6	7.9%
Looked beautiful/pretty	6	7.9%
Not sure	6	7.9%
Hair	4	5.3%
Looked “mixed”	3	3.9%

Responses in the “Facial structure” category included descriptions such as facial features, face structure, soft features, bone structure, and defining features. A sample response to this category is, “This face is the most beautiful because of the structure of her face.” There were a total of 14 responses (18.4%) in this category. The “Facial parts” category had a total of ten tally marks and included responses which listed specific facial parts such as eyes, nose, and lips. All



responses which included one or more of these specific facial parts were tally marked in this category. Several responses included more than one facial part but only one tally mark was used under the “Facial parts” category. The next category was “Other,” and this included responses that were indefinable or didn’t fit into any other category. Some of these responses included, “the picture quality looks better,” “she looks like a mom,” “she resembled most of them,” “she looks like she’s smirking,” “all of them were beautiful,” or “did not pick any.” There were a total of ten responses in this category.

The responses for the “Skin tone/quality” category included descriptions of skin types such as: clear skin, light skin, tan skin, good complexion, and fair skin. There were a total of nine responses in this category. A sample response is, “she’s not too dark or too light. It looks like she has the right complexion and skin tone. She would look like someone that would appear on the runway or in an ad in a magazine.” The next category is “Looks like me,” and this category includes responses that stated the picture looked similar to the participants themselves, looked Asian, and/or resembled relatives of theirs. Some sample response are: “I guess I view this face as most beautiful because I am reminded of the beautiful Asian women of my family,” and “She looks more closely related to me.” For the category, “Natural/innocent face” responses included the key words of natural and innocent. There were a total of six responses (7.9%) in this category. The seventh category is “Looked beautiful/pretty” and this included responses which stated that the face they chose was the most beautiful or prettiest out of all the faces. There were six responses to this category.

For the “Not sure” category, responses that explicitly included “not sure” or “I don’t know” were tallied in this category. There were a total of six responses (7.9%) in the “Not sure” category. The “Hair” category included all the responses that mentioned the beauty of the

model's hair. There were four responses (5.3%) for the "Hair" category. The last category is "Looked 'mixed,'" and this included all the responses that stated the model looked like a mixed race or looked like a mix between Asian and Black. There were a total of three responses (3.9%) in this category.

*Research Hypothesis 3: Hmong American college women would be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful body shape.*

Survey questions five and six were used to address this hypothesis. Question five gave the participants nine pictures of body shapes and asked them which picture they would consider as the most beautiful body shape. Question six asked the participants why they chose that specific body shape. These two questions were used to identify whether the participants would tend to choose the same body shape and why they chose it. Out of the nine body shapes given, only four pictures were chosen. Body shape #4 was the most frequently chosen picture; it had 35 responses (70%). For question five, there were a total of 50 responses.

Table 10

*Which Picture Would You Consider to be the Most Beautiful Body Shape?*

Body Shape Number	Total Respondents (n=50)	Percent of Total Responses
1	0	0.0%
2	3	6.0%
3	5	10.0%
4	35	70.0%
5	7	14.0%
6	0	0.0%
7	0	0.0%
8	0	0.0%
9	0	0.0%

Responses to question six, “Of the body shape you chose, why do you consider that body shape to be the most beautiful?” were coded into six categories. These six categories include: not too skinny/not too fat, curves/hour glass figure, fit/healthy, breasts, thinness, and other. There were a total of 69 tally marks with the category, “Not too skinny/not too fat” having the highest responses with 38 tally marks.

Table 11

*Why Do You Consider That Body Shape to be the Most Beautiful?*

Categories	Total Tally Marks (n=69)	Percent of Total Tally Marks
Not too skinny/not too fat	38	55.1%
Fit/healthy	14	20.3%
Curves/hour glass figure	11	15.9%
Other	3	4.3%
Breasts	2	2.9%
Thinness	1	1.5%

Responses to the category “Not too skinny/not too fat” included responses such as: average, in the middle, and not too big or too small. A sample response in this category includes, “I think that's the most beautiful because it's right in the middle. They aren't too skinny or too fat.” The category that had the second highest responses with 14 responses (20.3%) was “Fit/healthy.” For this category, responses with the words “fit” and “healthy” were tally marked into this category. For the “Curves/hour glass figure” category, responses included descriptions of body shapes that were curvy and/or had an hour glass figure. A sample response in this category includes, “I think this body shape is most beautiful because it looks like a healthy standard body. It retains the curves a woman should have naturally, keeping the body balanced between being too heavy and being too light.” This response was also tally marked into the “Not too skinny/not too fat” and the “Fit/healthy” categories. There were a total of 11 responses (15.9%) in this category.

The fourth highest category “Other” included responses that didn’t fit into any of the categories or were vague in their answers. There were only three tally marks in this category. The next category, “Breasts,” includes responses which mentioned the chest or breast size in comparison to the body. There were two tally marks (2.9%) in this category. Finally, the last category was “Thinness,” and this category only had one response (1.5%) in which the participant answered that she preferred the body shape that was on the skinnier side.

*Research Hypothesis 4: Women who are considered as “in-group” members would have the biggest influence over Hmong American college women’s perception of beauty.*

Question seven asked the participants to rank in order the factors that had the most influence on their perceptions of beauty and body image; with (1) being the most influential to (12) being the least influential. There were a total of 12 options: western media, western celebrities, Asian media, Asian celebrities, western culture, traditional Hmong culture, Hmong friends, non-Hmong friends, siblings, parents, significant other, and other. For the “other” option, participants were able to write in their own answer. Some of these answers included men, religion, lifestyle, and Manga/books. There were a total of 50 responses to question seven and the results are shown in figure 1.

*Figure 3. The Most Influential Factors in Perception of Beauty and Body Image*

#	Answer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Responses
1	Western Media (TV, movies, magazines, etc.)	16	9	4	4	4	3	2	2	2	1	3	0	50
2	Western celebrities	6	8	6	8	6	1	2	1	8	4	0	0	50
3	Asian Media (TV, movies, magazines, etc.)	2	8	6	6	8	3	6	3	2	4	1	1	50
4	Asian celebrities	4	6	4	7	5	5	3	5	5	4	2	0	50
5	Western culture	3	2	13	3	4	6	2	5	3	3	5	1	50
6	Traditional Hmong Culture	1	1	4	2	3	7	5	6	8	5	8	0	50
7	Hmong Friends	6	1	4	4	4	8	8	7	4	2	2	0	50
8	Non-Hmong Friends	0	1	0	3	5	6	7	9	6	6	7	0	50
9	Siblings	1	5	4	4	3	4	8	4	6	8	3	0	50
10	Parents	3	2	4	1	4	1	3	6	4	10	10	2	50
11	Significant Other (boyfriend, husband, etc.)	5	7	1	5	4	6	4	2	2	3	9	2	50
12	Other:	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	44	50
	Total	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	

Participants chose “western media” 16 times as the number one factor that influenced their perceptions of beauty and body image. Western media was also chosen nine times as the second highest factor. Western celebrities appeared to come in second; it was chosen eight times as the number two factor; and six times as the number three factor. The most influential factors appear to be Western media, Western celebrities, Asian media, Asian celebrities, and Western culture. Hmong friends, Significant other, and Siblings appear to be factors but did not influence the participants as much as the first four. Traditional Hmong culture, Non-Hmong friends, Parents, and Other did not appear to be significant factors.

## Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter will analyze the results from the Hmong American College Women's Perception of Beauty survey and will discuss how the results relate to the research concerning Asian American women. This chapter will also present the limitations of the study and will conclude with recommendations for future research involving the beauty and body images of Hmong American women.

### *Summary*

This paper examined research about the effects of mainstream body image on Asian American women, with a focus on Hmong women. It has been shown that Asian American women are very similar to White women in their responses and appeared to find the mainstream standard of beauty as ideal (Evans & McConnell, 2003). Studies have also shown that Asians have higher rates of plastic surgery than any other minority group, with double eyelid surgery and nasal implants being the most requested procedures (Chan, 2007; Kawamura, 2004; Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999). These procedures attempt to alter the physical traits that are common across many Asian groups, such as changing an epicanthic eye-fold and a broad nose into more western looking features (Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999). Attempts to fit idealized images have also resulted in dieting and weight control; although, there are contradicting research about whether Asian women have weight concerns or not (Haynie, 2007; Tsai et al, 1998; Ogden & Elder, 1998; Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999; Cummins & Lehman, 2007; Chan, 2007; Eating Disorders, n.d., n.p.). This paper also discussed contributing factors such as acculturation and racial teasing and the roles that each of these factors play in Asian and minority women's beauty ideals (Perez et al, 2002; Kawamura, 2004; Petrie et al, 2002; Iyer & Haslam, 2003; Lee & Vaught, 2003).

Hmong are an Asian subgroup that has only been in the United States for about three decades. There has been very little research regarding Hmong women and their ideals of body image and beauty, so information can only be generalized through previous research done on other Asian groups. Most previous research involving Asian women mainly included those of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, or Vietnamese descent; and the history of those ethnic Asian groups is different from that of the Hmong. Of the limited research done on Hmong women, it is apparent that mainstream beauty ideals have affected them but more research needs to be done to determine if their perceptions are congruent with other Asian American female beauty ideals (Lee and Vaught, 2003; Lee, 2005; Lee, 2007).

The purpose of the study was to find the beauty ideals of Hmong American college women and to determine the factors that affect their views of beauty. An online survey was sent to three Hmong/Asian organizations at three different universities across western Wisconsin; a total of 51 surveys were completed. The following is a discussion of the survey results in accordance with the hypotheses of this paper.

### *Discussion of Survey Results*

The survey began with asking the participants to answer what they believe to be beautiful in a woman. This was an open-ended question used to determine if Hmong American women had similar views on beauty. The results showed that Hmong American women tend to define beauty in terms of personality traits such as being confident, kind, generous, having an overall good personality, and being educated. Confidence was the most given response with generosity/kindness and personality coming in third and fourth. Although the participants tended to describe beauty in abstract forms, they also described beauty with physical traits as well. Physical beauty was the second most given response, and this included answers such as being



skinny and tall, having big eyes and a thin nose, clear skin, and a symmetrical face; which are similar to mainstream ideals of beauty. Traditional ideals of Hmong beauty reflected fuller and rounder figures (Lee, 2007). There were very few to no responses that matched that of the traditional Hmong beauty ideal.

The participants also listed that style, clothes, and makeup were important determinants in a woman's beauty. Although the survey did not ask the participants to disclose specific details concerning dress and styles; the researcher is assuming that style means clothing that is current and popular. In Lee's (2005) ethnographic study, she found that the Hmong youth used clothing as identifiers of being "Americanized." Lee writes, "Like other immigrant youth, the Americanized youth had learned that consumerism is a sign of American-ness, and they were quick to wear the signs of American-ness" (p. 54). This research does not focus on clothing and style in terms of beauty for Hmong American women, but it is an area of study that should be pursued in the future; along with an emphasis on "Americanization." The following will discuss the four research hypotheses with the survey results.

*Research Hypothesis 1: Hmong American college women will be able to recognize and identify mainstream ideals of beauty.*

The mainstream ideal of beauty in the United States can be seen on T.V., in the movies, in magazines and advertisements, and on almost every commercial billboard. This ideal is usually described as being tall and thin with blonde hair, blue eyes, large breasts, and voluptuousness (Lee, 2005; Chan, 2007). Question three in the survey asked participants to define what they think the predominant standard of beauty is in the United States. This question was used as a control to determine if the participants were able to identify the mainstream standard of beauty and if they were consistent in their responses. The researcher is assuming that

the participants have lived long enough in the United States to be able to recognize idealized images. The findings show that Hmong American college women were able to recognize and identify mainstream ideals of beauty.

The majority of the participants identified that being skinny and tall, having nice hair, and having specific facial features were representative of the idealized standard of beauty. Being skinny and tall were the two main responses, followed by having nice hair and having specific facial features. Although the characteristics of being skinny and tall were easily identified and expected by the researcher, hair and facial features were a surprise. Hair was identified as being an important characteristic of the mainstream beauty ideal, but there were different variations. Of the 14 total tally marks for "Hair;" blonde hair was mentioned six times. The other responses included having beautiful, voluptuous, and nice hair. It appears that Hmong American women recognize blonde hair as being a characteristic of the mainstream beauty ideal along with having voluptuous hair. Hmong American women also listed specific facial features such as having big eyes, full lips, and a thin nose as characteristics. Having big eyes was mentioned the most out of all the facial features.

The Hmong have only been in the United States for about 30 years and within that time period, they have been able to identify what mainstream society considers as beautiful. Other Asian groups have been in the United States for a much longer amount of time and have definitely been affected by mainstream ideals of beauty. This is evident in the rates of plastic surgery among Asians; actions which attempt to alter racially defined features to enlarge their eyes and to define their nose (Chan, 2007; Kawamura, 2004; Mintz & Kashubeck, 1999). It is unknown how much Hmong women are being affected by Americanized beauty ideals, but the

researcher notes that there are several advertisements posted at the local Hmong grocery stores advertising eye and nose surgery with a Hmong plastic surgeon.

*Research Hypothesis 2: Hmong American college women will be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful face.*

Question three and four in the survey asked the participants to choose the face that they would consider to be the most “beautiful” and to identify why they chose that face. These questions were used to identify whether the participants would choose similar faces or faces that resembled them. Social comparison theory postulates that people tend to compare themselves to those who are similar to them (Wood, 1989; Evans & McConnell, 2003). Using this theory, the researcher hypothesized that Hmong American college women would be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful face and would pick a face that would most closely resemble their own or relatives of theirs. The results were inconclusive. There were a total of ten faces and all the faces were picked at least once. The faces were shown as a gradient scale, ranging from looking White to Hispanic to Black and finally to looking more Asian. Although responses were all across the board, there were two faces that were picked the most: face #8 was chosen 12 times (24%) and face #10 was chosen ten times (20%) out of 49 responses. Both of these faces had very distinct Asian features.

The reasons why participants chose a certain face as the most beautiful ranged from the models’ facial structure to the model looking innocent. The most common response was the model’s facial structure and the second most common response were specific facial parts of the model. Slightly more than ten percent of the respondents stated that the model they chose looked similar to them or to their relatives. The eighth, ninth and tenth faces were the only ones receiving responses supporting these attitudes. All three of these faces resembled a person of

Asian descent. It could be that a strong personal resemblance prompted them to choose the face they did. For example, some participants responded with “Facial structure” as a reason for picking their face – but those facial structures could also resemble their own. It is unknown whether this may be a reason because the questionnaire was entirely perception based and did not ask participants to identify any resemblance to the survey faces. There is not enough information to use social comparison theory in this case. Although the more Asian looking faces were picked the most out of all the choices, results for this hypothesis are inconclusive because the percentages were not significant enough to clearly state that Hmong American women would choose a face that resembled their own as beautiful.

*Research Hypothesis 3: Hmong American college women will be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful body shape.*

Questions five and six in the survey asked participants to choose what they would consider to be the most beautiful body shape and why they chose that specific body shape. These two questions were used to identify whether participants would tend to choose the same body shape and if so, why they chose it. The researcher used social comparison theory and hypothesized that Hmong American college women would be consistent in their choice of the most beautiful body shape. The researcher assumed that Hmong American women would choose a body shape that most likely resembles their own.

Results showed that Hmong American women did tend to choose the same body shape as the body shapes identified as being most beautiful. Seventy percent of the participants chose body shape #4 as the most beautiful one. The shapes chosen ranged from body shape #1 (extremely anorexic looking) to body shape #9 (extremely obese looking). The body shapes that Hmong women tended to choose ranged from body shape #2-5. More than half (55.1%) of the

responses to why participants chose the body shape they did indicated that the body shape was not too fat and not too skinny; the shape was right in the middle. Although the body shape pictures were only drawings and were not fully representative of Hmong women's body shapes, most of the participants chose the same body shape.

It appears that Hmong American women prefer the ideal body size to be in the middle range; not too skinny and not too fat. Although it can be hypothesized from the results that Hmong women consider a medium size body as the most beautiful, there are some factors that may contribute to these results. The pictures may have looked distorted and may not have been representative of Hmong women's bodies and therefore the participants chose a body that appeared to look the healthiest. In addition, due to central tendency, participants may have just chosen a body shape in the middle of the range for the sake of choosing a shape; not necessarily because they considered that body to be the most beautiful. Suggestions for further research may include having pictures that more closely resemble Hmong women's bodies.

*Research Hypothesis 4: Women who are considered as "in-group" members would have the biggest influence over Hmong American college women's perception of beauty.*

Question seven in the survey asked participants to rank order the factors that most influenced their perceptions of beauty and body image. Using social comparison theory, the researcher assumed that the participants would be most affected by those who most closely resemble them, such as the participants' Hmong friends and Asian celebrities. There were a total of 12 options: western media, western celebrities, Asian media, Asian celebrities, western culture, traditional Hmong culture, Hmong friends, non-Hmong friends, siblings, parents, significant other, and other. The most influential factors appear to be in order: Western media, Western celebrities, Asian media, Asian celebrities, and Western culture. Hmong friends,

Significant other, and Siblings appear to be contributing factors but did not influence the participants as much as the first four. Traditional Hmong culture, Non-Hmong friends, Parents, and Other did not appear to be significant factors.

As with the research on Asian American women, it appears that western media and western images have the most influence over Hmong American women's perception of beauty. Asian media and Asian celebrities also have a large influence on Hmong women, but many times those Asian actresses and models embody mainstream features. Chan (2007) writes, "Some researchers have asserted that only when Asians represent a Eurocentric beauty, will they be more accepted into mainstream culture (p. 9). So, although Asian media and Asian celebrities are contributing factors, many actors/models do not portray traditional Asian ideals of beauty. Therefore, mainstream western ideals of beauty appear to be the most influential factor impacting the beauty perceptions of Hmong American college women.

### *Conclusions*

The findings suggest that Hmong American women's beauty and body ideals are similar to the body of research regarding Asian American women, in that mainstream images appear to be highly influential on their beauty ideals. However, within this research study, some of the results are inconclusive due to limitations regarding the validity of the survey. The primary objective of this research was to find out what Hmong American college women perceive as being beautiful and to identify factors that contribute to their definitions of beauty. Along with that primary objective, the researcher wanted to find out if Hmong women aligned with other Asian women in their acceptance of beauty ideals. The survey results showed that in terms of facial beauty, Hmong women did not choose the same facial portraits as the ones categorized as ideal beauty. Although the top two responses for the most beautiful face were Asian-looking

models, the percentages were not high enough to state that Hmong women would consistently pick a face that looked similar to theirs. For the most beautiful body shape, the majority of Hmong women chose a body shape that was in the middle range. While the results suggested that Hmong women prefer a body shape that is not too thin and not too large, there were too many outstanding factors that may have contributed to the participants' decision of the category, most beautiful body shape. But it is still note-worthy to see what the participants chose and why they chose that body. The majority stated that the body was "not too thin/not too fat," and that the body looked "healthy." Even though there were outstanding factors, Hmong women may have only picked what is considered to be socially acceptable. For the factors that influenced Hmong American women the most in their perceptions of beauty; it is clear that western media and western images have impacted Hmong women. As with Asian American women, Hmong women recognize what the mainstream beauty ideals are and are influenced by those images. It is unknown to what extent those images have affected Hmong women because this survey was entirely based upon the participants' perceptions, not their actual body measurements. This paper has shown that there is a need for further research regarding the body images of Hmong women.

### *Limitations*

The findings of this study may have been limited by the following factors. The participants may not have been representative of all Hmong women as a whole. The study involved only Hmong women who were currently attending a 4-year university and their level of education may affect how they view beauty in comparison to Hmong women who are not in college. Secondly, the participants may have answered the survey questions in a way that they perceive the researcher is looking for or what they thought was socially acceptable; therefore the data may not reflect their true perceptions of beauty. In addition, the pictures used in the survey

may not have been fully representative of what Hmong women view as a beautiful face and a beautiful body shape.

### *Recommendations*

One purpose of this paper was to address the initial lack of research regarding Hmong American women and their perceptions of beauty. By attempting to answer the question “What do Hmong women find beautiful in a female?” the researcher hoped to provide a more solid starting point for initiating future investigation of issues regarding Hmong American women. The researcher would recommend for a continuation of this study by using more valid and reliable measurement tools such as body image surveys, body satisfaction/dissatisfaction surveys, dieting behavior questionnaires, self-esteem questionnaires, body comparison scales, acculturation scales, and measurements of media influences. Due to time and funding constraints, the researcher was only able to scratch the surface on Hmong American women’s body image.

Further suggestions for future studies may be to focus on the role clothing and style plays in complementing and defining the beauty ideals of Hmong females. The results from this survey showed that numerous participants indicated the importance of clothing and style as part of their definitions of beauty. The use of specific clothing styles and makeup may be a manifestation of the pressure to become “Americanized” and to therefore define themselves as beautiful. Focusing on the “Americanization” and acculturation process of Hmong American women may also be beneficial for understanding body image issues. This can be done by comparing the Hmong women who were born and raised in the United States to those Hmong women who have just recently immigrated to the United States. The length of time a participant has been in the United States may affect how she views beauty.



In addition, this study specifically focused on perceptions; it did not focus on the participants' actual body measurements. An idea for future research would be to compare Hmong women's actual height and weight to their preferred height and weight. The discrepancy or similarity between these two numbers may provide further insight into body satisfaction or dissatisfaction among Hmong women. Conducting comparative studies such as comparing different age groups and different education levels of Hmong women would also be beneficial. In addition, studying the amount of media consumed by Hmong women may also be helpful. Hmong women's body and beauty image is an area that has not been widely focused on, but it is a growing concern. With such a high Hmong population in Wisconsin, Minnesota and California, educators, healthcare providers, and counselors need this type of research data in order to better understand the body image perceptions of Hmong women

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## Appendix A: Online Survey

### *Beauty Perceptions Survey of Hmong-American College Females*

**Instructions:** Please be honest in your responses. There are no wrong answers.

#### **Section I – Personal Definitions of Beauty**

**The following question indicates your definitions of beauty.**

1. What do you consider as “beautiful” in a woman? **Write your answer below.**

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2. Please define what you think is the predominant standard of beauty in the U.S. **Write your answer below.**

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#### **Section II – Beauty Perception**

**The following questions indicate your beauty perceptions.**

3. Which picture would you consider as the most “beautiful?” **(Circle only one image.)**



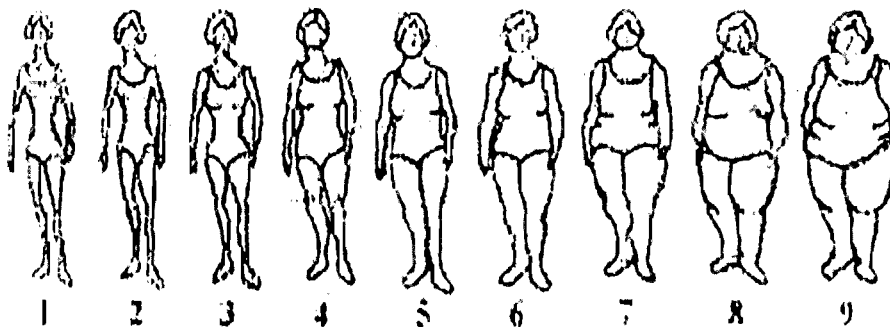
4. Of the face you chose, why do you consider that face to be the most beautiful? **Please write your answer below.**

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5. Which picture would you consider to be the most beautiful body shape? **(Circle only one image.)**



6. Of the body shape you chose, why do you consider that body shape to be the most beautiful? **Please write your answer below.**

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### Section III – Influential Factors

The following question asks you to rate what has had the most influence over your perceptions of beauty.

7. What factors have influenced you the most in your perceptions of beauty and body image?

Please rate from 1-12. (1 = most influential, 12 = least influential).

\_\_\_\_\_ a. Western Media (TV, movies, magazines, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ b. Western celebrities

\_\_\_\_\_ c. Asian Media (TV, movies, magazines, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ d. Asian celebrities

\_\_\_\_\_ e. Western culture

\_\_\_\_\_ f. Traditional Hmong culture

\_\_\_\_\_ g. Hmong Friends

\_\_\_\_\_ h. Non-Hmong Friends

\_\_\_\_\_ i. Siblings

\_\_\_\_\_ j. Parents

\_\_\_\_\_ k. Significant Other (boyfriend, husband, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ l. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Is there any other information about your perceptions of beauty that you would like to share?

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**Section IV – General Information**

**Demographic Information:** Please place a check mark (✓) next to select answers or provide a written response that best describes you.

9. Are you Hmong?

\_\_\_\_\_ a. Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ b. No

10. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years

11. Current level in college:

\_\_\_\_\_ a. Freshman

\_\_\_\_\_ b. Sophomore

\_\_\_\_\_ c. Junior

\_\_\_\_\_ d. Senior

12. What college do you attend?

\_\_\_\_\_

13. Number of years you have lived in the U.S.: \_\_\_\_\_ years

14. Country you were born in:

\_\_\_\_\_ a. United States

\_\_\_\_\_ b. Thailand

\_\_\_\_\_ c. Laos

\_\_\_\_\_ d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

15. Marital Status:

\_\_\_\_\_ a. Single

\_\_\_\_\_ b. Married

\_\_\_\_\_ c. Divorced

\_\_\_\_\_ d. Widowed

16. Do you have any children?

\_\_\_\_\_ a. Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ b. No

## Appendix B: University of Wisconsin-Stout IRB Approval Letter



Research Services  
152 Voc Rehab Building

University of Wisconsin-Stout  
P.O. Box 790  
Menomonie, WI 54751-0790

715/232-1126  
715/232-1749 (fax)  
<http://www.uwstout.edu/rs/>

**Date:** October 28, 2009

**To:** Kia Lee

**Cc:** Renee Howarton

**From:** Sue Foxwell  
Research Administrator and Human Protection Administrator  
UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB)

**Subject:** Protection of Human Subjects

Your project, "*Hmong-American Women's Perception of Beauty*" has been reviewed by the IRB through the expedited review process. This protocol will not be approved until the following items are addressed and Research Services has received your revision.

**Reviewer Comments:**

- I suggest that your results will be generalizable within the population of Hmong women beyond the sample itself; therefore in #2, the second box should be checked "yes".

**Please send revisions to Research Services - 152 Voc Rehab.**

**\*NOTE: This is the only notice you will receive – no paper copy will be sent.**

## Appendix C: Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research

### Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research

**Title:** Hmong-American Women's Perceptions of Beauty

**Investigator:**

Kia Lee  
4943 Kappus Drive, Apt. 6  
Eau Claire, WI 54701  
715-212-8147  
[leeki@my.uwstout.edu](mailto:leeki@my.uwstout.edu)

**Research Sponsor:**

Dr. Renee Howarton  
250 Tech Wing  
UW-Stout  
Menomonie, WI 54751  
715-232-2540  
[howartonr@uwstout.edu](mailto:howartonr@uwstout.edu)

**Description:**

The objective of this research is to determine what Hmong-American college women perceive as physical beauty and to identify the most important factors that may influence their perceptions. Very little is known regarding what Hmong American women actually consider to be beautiful. In order to further an understanding of those factors that contribute to creating beauty and body image ideals among Hmong American women, a definition of Hmong beauty must be established. This research will be used as a starting point for future research of Hmong American women's body image issues.

**Risks and Benefits:**

Risks to taking the online survey are minimal because the survey is entirely based on your own opinions. However, depending on your perceptions of beauty, you may experience brief feelings of negativity about your own body image while taking the survey. If you are uncomfortable with any question, you may skip it and continue to the next one. The online survey will not force you to answer questions.

The benefits of taking this survey will be to provide more information about Hmong American women and the effects of growing up in two different cultures. The results of this survey will help further research about the psychology of Hmong American women and to increase the body of information about their perceptions of beauty. This information can also be used to better the understanding of Hmong women's body perceptions, which will be useful for counseling purposes.

**Time Commitment and Payment:**

It will take about 10-15 minutes to complete the online survey.

**Confidentiality:**

You will not be asked to disclose any information that may identify you. Your name and email address will not be included on any documents that may be visible to anyone other than the researcher and statistician. We do not believe that you can be identified from any of this information.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study; you may exit out of the online survey at any time. There is no way to identify you if you choose to participate or not.

**IRB Approval:**

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

**Investigator:**

Kia Lee  
715-212-8147  
[leeki@my.uwstout.edu](mailto:leeki@my.uwstout.edu)

**IRB Administrator**

Sue Foxwell, Director, Research Services  
152 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg.  
UW-Stout  
Menomonie, WI 54751  
715-232-2477  
[foxwells@uwstout.edu](mailto:foxwells@uwstout.edu)

**Advisor:**

Dr. Renee Howarton  
715-232-2540  
[howartonr@uwstout.edu](mailto:howartonr@uwstout.edu)

**Statement of Consent:**

By completing the following online survey you agree to participate in the project entitled, "Hmong-American Women's Perceptions of Beauty."

## Appendix D: Invitation Email to Participants

This email is only for Hmong females over the age of 18, if this does not describe you please disregard this email.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear female Hmong student,

You are invited to participate in a study about the **beauty perceptions of Hmong American college women**. The objective of this research is to determine what Hmong American women perceive as physical beauty and to identify the most important factors that may influence their perceptions. Very little is known regarding what Hmong American women actually consider to be beautiful. In order to further an understanding of those factors that contribute to creating beauty and body image ideals among Hmong American women, a definition of Hmong beauty must be established. This research will be used as a starting point for future research of Hmong American college women's body image issues.

### Risks and Benefits:

Risks to taking the online survey are minimal because the survey is entirely based on your own opinions. However, depending on your perceptions of beauty, you may experience brief feelings of negativity about your own body image while taking the survey. If you are uncomfortable with any question, you may skip it and continue to the next one. The online survey will not force you to answer questions.

The benefits of taking this survey will be to provide more information about Hmong American women and the effects of growing up in two different cultures. The results of this survey will help further research about the psychology of Hmong American women and to increase the body of information about their perceptions of beauty. This information can also be used to better the understanding of Hmong women's body perceptions, which will be useful for counseling purposes.

### Time Commitment:

It will take about 10-15 minutes to complete the online survey.

### Confidentiality:

You will not be asked to disclose any information that may identify you. Your name and email address will not be included on any documents that may be visible to anyone other than the researcher and statistician. We do not believe that you can be identified from any of this information.

Below you will find a link that will take you to the survey. To get started, simply click on the link to begin taking the survey.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Survey link: Please take this survey by **3:00 pm on Wednesday, November 18.**

To participate in the survey you must be **Hmong**, be a **female**, **attend a college/university**, and be **over the age of 18**. If this does not describe you, please disregard this email. Please only take this survey once.

[http://uwstout.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV\\_aaEZouP93WROK0I&SVID=Prod](http://uwstout.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_aaEZouP93WROK0I&SVID=Prod)

Kia Lee, Researcher  
leeki@my.uwstout.edu