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Out of the Spotlight and into the Shadows:  
An Examination of Communication about Adolescent Girls on Music Television

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Communication  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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by  
Stacy Nichole Fentress  
May 2002

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Keywords: Adolescent Girls, Music Television (MTV), Body Dissatisfaction, Confidence Slide,  
Cultivation Theory

## ABSTRACT

### Out of the Spotlight and into the Shadows: An Examination of Communication about Adolescent Girls on Music Television

by

Stacy Nichole Fentress

This study examines portrayals of adolescent girls on Music Television (MTV).

A content analysis of 26 hours of MTV programming was conducted and analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Analyzed programming was shown August-November 2001. Dates were chosen randomly; times were chosen randomly from the pool of hours in which adolescents usually watch television.

Adolescent girls predominantly appear in the background of MTV programs. Many of them cheer for male celebrities, but only 12% speak. The content analysis reveals that a narrow beauty ideal is promoted on the channel—most girls are thin, White, and wearing revealing clothing. It is argued that MTV portrayals exacerbate girls' body dissatisfaction, sexual objectification, and confidence slide.

This study is significant because the stories told on MTV are reflected in the lived world, and those stories suggest that girls should sit quietly in the background and be thin and White to be considered beautiful.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Television is a major agent of socialization in American culture. The vast majority of American homes, 99.4%, are equipped with at least one television set (Nielsen, 1998). Of those homes with television, three-fourths have more than one television set (Andreasen, 2001). As the number of people who have grown up around television increases, it becomes easier to take television's role in our socialization for granted. It is easy to forget about how television has "transformed the cultural process of storytelling into a centralized, standardized, market-driven, advertising-sponsored system" (Signorielli & Morgan, 2001, p. 334). Now, instead of hearing cultural stories communicated orally from people in our own communities, we are hearing stories and seeing the corresponding visual images through televised communication. Television is, as cultural scholar Neil Postman asserted, "the command center of the culture" (as quoted in Weiner, 1999, para. 23).

While a variety of audiences watch television, American children and adolescents especially immerse themselves in the stories told on television. They spend approximately 40 hours every week consuming various media, and much of that time is dominated by the consumption of television specifically (Bryant & Bryant, 2001; Weiner, 1999). Sixty-five percent of children 8 years and older have television sets in their bedrooms (Bryant & Bryant; Weiner), suggesting not only easy access to the medium, but also potentially less adult supervision when children and adolescents are watching television.

Music is another communication form that entertains adolescents, and Music Television (MTV) represents the unique marriage of music and televised images. Adolescents spend between 30 minutes and two hours a day watching MTV (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 1996). MTV has securely anchored itself into adolescent culture—73% of boys and 78% of girls between the ages of 12 and 19 watch the channel at least six hours a week (Cromie,



1998). The channel has become the storyteller for a new generation of adolescents—a large part of what they learn about our society’s expectations, relationships, and life in general is dictated by MTV’s programming (Wilson, 2001).

### The Influence of MTV

MTV is a powerful network that reaches 249 million homes in 88 different countries (57 million of those homes are in the United States) (Zagano, 1994). The channel is a storyteller for adolescents, providing them with a non-stop cultural narrative. MTV cultivates ideas about how people should act and be treated, what music people should like, what language people should use, what makes people valuable, what people should wear and consume, and how people should look or want to look. Through slick advertisements and well-produced shows and videos, MTV communicates to adolescents what is expected of them, offers an idealized picture of life, and encourages adolescents to emulate that ideal. In short, the stories shown and told on MTV teach adolescents what they have to do to be accepted and liked. Everything on the channel is an advertisement, and at the same time MTV is packaging and selling youth culture, it is setting the standards for youth culture.

### Cultivation Theory

The standard that MTV sets for youth influences their actual lived culture. Central to the premise that the stories MTV tells affect the lives of adolescents is cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1980; Infante et al., 1997). The theory asserts that the media, especially television, are responsible for influencing our perceptions of everyday reality and its norms. Cultivation theory arose from Gerbner’s studies through which he found that people who were heavy viewers of television, those who watch four or more hours per day, lived fearfully and overestimated their chances of being victims of crime. Gerbner and Gross concluded that 80% of prime time programming contained violence, so people who watched heavy amounts of

television had more exposure to violence. Viewing heavy amounts of violence on television cultivated in its viewers the idea that the world is more dangerous than actual crime and violence statistics suggest. Heavy viewers estimated their chances of being a victim of crime as 1 in 10, when their chances actually approximated 1 in 50 (Potter & Chang, 1990). Television cultivates notions about the world that extend beyond perceptions of violence as well. Potter and Chang also found, for example, that heavy viewers of soap operas are more likely than light viewers to believe in the importance of luck and the idea that the strong survive. Signorielli and Lears (1992) discovered, in addition, that television viewing cultivates beliefs about the gendered division of labor in the home. Cultivation theory could further illuminate the messages that MTV programming sends to adolescents because it suggests that the themes and stories told on MTV over time shape perceptions of what is normal and “real.” The narratives told on MTV translate into lived culture. The ability to influence what translates into lived *adolescent* culture makes MTV a very powerful medium, and is an important focus of this study.

### Importance of this Study

The power and impact of MTV have been overlooked by researchers who have chosen instead to study the content of music videos and song lyrics, which make up only a small part of the channel’s programming. MTV’s programming also includes game shows, reality shows, artist specials, movies, promotional advertisements for the channel, sports and music festivals, live artist performances, music videos, and video request shows. To get the whole story, MTV should be examined as a network. Researchers should study its programming more exhaustively so that we can have a broader understanding of the stories it translates to adolescents.

This project serves to build upon the work of other researchers who have examined media portrayals of girls by focusing on the messages that MTV programming specifically sends to adolescent girls. As the “international institution of pop culture” (Daly, 2001), MTV is sending strong messages to viewers every day—many of whom are girls. Researchers have documented

that girls' confidence levels drop when they reach adolescence; one of the contributors to the drop is the influence of mediated messages, because adolescence is the time that girls begin to internalize the unrealistic physical and social expectations the media creates for them (Currie, 1999; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1995; Sadker & Sadker, 1995). American adolescent girls are more prone to eating disorders, suicide attempts, depression, and addiction than ever before (Pipher). For many, interest in school and the curiosity and desire to learn begins to diminish in middle school (Orenstein; Pipher; Sadker & Sadker). Feminist scholar Simone De Beauvoir declared that adolescence is the stage where girls "stop being and start seeming" (as quoted in Pipher, p. 22). De Beauvoir further asserted that adolescence is the time when girls realize that males have the power, and that their own power only comes from consenting to become submissive, adored objects (as cited in Pipher). Girls become "female impersonators": They begin imitating other females in the culture, many of whom are introduced to girls through the media (Pipher, p. 22). Adults must ensure that girls have every opportunity to *be*, and not merely to *seem*. If we are to save the girls in our culture from lives of failing to reach goals that are unattainable and truly make life better for them, we must understand the messages they are getting from MTV, a channel where many of them spend much of their time.

Television is a powerful medium, and it serves as a storyteller in our culture. Over time, the stories that are told and the portrayals of people that are shown on television cultivate beliefs in viewers about what is normal, real, and attainable in everyday life. Because adolescents are spending so much time with the media, and with MTV in particular, the stories and portrayals that are presented on MTV become a part of youth culture. Because MTV has the power to dictate youth culture, researchers need to examine the stories that are being transmitted on the channel. Specifically, we need to examine the stories that MTV is passing on to adolescent girls, a group of people who so often lose confidence in themselves.

### Overview of this Study

This study focused on the portrayals of adolescent girls on MTV, and the social implications of those portrayals. Relevant literature about MTV and adolescent girls is presented in the next chapter. The findings from the review of relevant literature in Chapter 2 lead to several research questions, which are stated in Chapter 3. The methods through which these questions are answered are discussed in Chapter 4. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in answering the research questions. In Chapter 5, the findings of the study are revealed. The findings are used to answer the research questions for this study in Chapter 6. Each question is answered individually, and an overall conclusion is provided. Finally, Chapter 7 provides a summary of the key points from Chapters 5 and 6. Limitations of this study are examined, and recommendations for further research are also offered in Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a summary of relevant literature about the relationship between MTV and adolescent girls' perceptions and behaviors. First, it examines the history of MTV and the channel's relationship to advertising. Second, cultivation theory is explained as having important implications for the study of MTV messages because it suggests that similar images repeated over time on television can cultivate beliefs in the lived world. Third, several problems that affect girls in the lived world—eating disorders and body dissatisfaction, violence and dehumanization, and the confidence slide—are examined in relationship to MTV messages. Finally, the chapter ends with a brief summary and a preview of Chapter 3.

#### MTV as an Advertising Outlet

The media are pervasive in American society. As media are paid for through advertising dollars, advertising is as pervasive in American society as the media outlets themselves. The advertisements that we are most likely to remember are from television because it is, as Boush (2001) argues, “an intrusive medium by virtue of the combination of sight, sound, and motion so it is more likely to be noticed than other advertising media” (p. 399). Because advertisers' greatest challenge is to create advertisements that are noticed, television is the prime outlet. Average television viewers will see 120 commercials a day, and 40,000 commercials a year (Boush). Because children and adolescents have increasing market power—there are now 16 million girls aged 7 to 14 with access to 100 billion consumer dollars (Curan, 2000)—many of these advertisements are aimed at this demographic. Approximately 20,000 commercials per year are targeted to children and adolescents (Witt, 2000).

MTV was ahead of the youth-advertising curve (Lewis, 1990). The channel was created to deliver adolescents (especially male adolescents at the time of the channel's creation) to

advertisers. The idea for the channel was born when market researchers (hired by WASEC, a company that created cable channels) found that there were no cable channels specifically targeted to the most affluent consumer group—12-34 year olds. The executives at WASEC knew that their target consumer group had grown up with two specific media forms—music and television—and so decided to launch MTV in 1981. The channel was created as an advertising vehicle, designed to bring the adolescent market to advertisers. Male adolescents were specifically targeted because market researchers found that most rock n’ roll albums were purchased by males, giving credence to Lewis’ claim that “the ‘m’ in MTV stands for male” (p. 38). MTV has continued to grow since 1981 and has continued to bring adolescent males to advertisers. In the process, MTV brought, and continues to bring, rock n’ roll, and certain perceptions of it, to adolescent girls.

MTV was an immediate advertising success. By 1983, surveys showed that the channel influenced 63% of its viewers to buy certain albums; and for every nine albums (now compact discs and cassettes) bought by viewers, four of the purchases could be directly attributed to the viewing of the channel (Lewis, 1990). Most of MTV’s content was, and continues to be, made up of advertisements. The music videos are created by record labels to sell compact discs and cassettes, and many of the programs on MTV are paid for by sponsors like the Army, soft drink and fast food companies, movie production houses and the record labels themselves (Goodwin, 1992; Jhally, 1995; Kaplan, 1987; Lewis, 1990). MTV is an advertiser’s dream—it is the most recognized network by adolescents and young adults, and the average household income of MTV viewers is more than \$40,000 per year (“Multi-media advertising,” 2001).

MTV’s history has not been without controversy. In the beginning, MTV did not play videos by Black artists (Lewis, 1990). MTV video jockey (“VJ”) Mark Goodman justified leaving Black artists out of the mix by arguing, “We have to play music we think an entire country is going to like” (as quoted in Lewis, p. 40). The channel changed its tune in 1983 when Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* video was released (Lewis). It is interesting to note that *Thriller* still

shows up as the top video of all-time in MTV's *Top 100 of All Time* countdown every year, suggesting that what the American public likes is not, as MTV claimed, race-specific.

Women were included in MTV's video mix before Michael Jackson paved the way for Black performers in 1983. As early as 1982, women started showing up on MTV, and female audiences responded positively (Lewis, 1990). Still, even those videos were created for and marketed to adolescent males, thus reactivating "the ideologies and practices of female-musician exclusion, devaluation and derision" (Lewis, p. 68). Lewis followed the careers of four female performers—Pat Benetar, Tina Turner, Cyndi Lauper, and Madonna—who received airplay during MTV's early days. While all four artists' videos changed over time, and eventually began to give voice to female concerns and problems, they addressed female concerns in ways that were not threatening to dominant male ideology. For example, in her video for *Stop Using Sex as a Weapon*, Benetar is shooting male advertising executives and making fun of weight loss and cosmetics advertisements, but she is wearing heavy make-up and a leather catsuit over her very lean body throughout the video. Turner was often featured in the street, which is traditionally "male territory" (Lewis), in her videos, but her body remained the focus because she was shown in her trademark high-heeled shoes and mini-skirts. Lauper challenges sexist ideas in the lyrics of her song *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*, but the video focuses on shopping and talking on the phone, activities that have traditionally been trivialized as female pastimes. Finally, Madonna addresses the issue of unplanned pregnancy in her *Papa Don't Preach* video, but she also acts out a virgin/whore fantasy by appearing in some scenes as a fully-clothed, distressed daughter concerned with making the right decision, and in others as a siren in lingerie, dancing provocatively. Even though female performers were shown on MTV in the early days, they were presented to the male adolescent audience in ways that were more easily palatable for that catered-to audience—the female performers did not directly challenge or confront male dominance. If the female artists had directly challenged or confronted male dominance, they

probably would not have received airplay on MTV because channel executives would not want to disturb or lose sales from their target demographic, adolescent males.

As a network, MTV is a powerhouse. The channel is more valuable now than ever before to advertisers. Instead of focusing only on adolescent males, MTV now focuses on the entire youth market and offers advertisers access to millions of adolescent viewers—both male and female—every day (“Multi-media advertising,” 2001). In the process of delivering adolescents to advertisers, MTV is delivering content and programming to the adolescents who tune in every day. Because many of MTV’s programs do not look like traditional commercials, many of those adolescents do not realize they are watching advertisements. In their programs, MTV is showing adolescents what they should wear, how they should act, what bands they should listen to, how they should dance, and what they need to buy to fit in and be happy. Through music videos, MTV can dominate and frame the aural codes in popular culture, and provide visual signs for songs that are more powerful than the aural signs one gets from the music alone (Goodwin, 1992). Musicologist Richard Middleton asserted, “The video ‘boom’ is being used to try to ‘fix’ musical meanings, close off listeners’ interpretive autonomy, and at the same time, focus attention on a new technology under the control of the music leisure industries and the advertisers” (as quoted in Goodwin, p. 9). Middleton’s point was illustrated in a study of high school students in San Jose, California in the late 1980s: The survey found that 80% of the 600 students polled watched MTV for an average of two hours per day, and many looked to videos to figure out song meanings (Goodwin). The danger in relying on music videos for song interpretation is that often the imagery used in a video has nothing to do with the original meaning of the song, and the video is often conceptualized and created by someone other than the original artist.

Still, MTV constructs meanings for popular music through video images. It also constructs meanings for what it is to be an adolescent, or, more generally, male or female, through the depictions of people it features in its programming. Cultivation theory tells us that



the stories told in the media add up over time, influencing our perceptions of everyday norms and reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1980; Infante et al., 1997). Since adolescents tend to be heavy viewers of MTV, the stories told on the channel may influence their views of reality, and of their roles in it.

### Television and the Cultivation of Perspectives

Because it is impossible to separate our media from our culture, it is important to examine the stories the media tell. Cultivation theory asserts that television is responsible for influencing and cultivating our perceptions of everyday norms and reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1980; Infante et al., 1997). The original hypothesis stemmed from Gerbner's studies on media violence in the late 1960s and early 1970s through which he discovered that violent acts occurred in 80% of prime-time programming, and children's shows were the most violent of all. He also found that women and minorities were the most frequent victims (Gerbner & Gross; Infante et al.). Gerbner and his associates hypothesized that people who were heavy television viewers (four or more hours a day) were more fearful because of the violence they witnessed on television. When he tested the hypothesis, Gerbner found that people who were heavy television viewers did have a heightened sense of fear, they believed there was more crime (and more people working in law enforcement) than statistics suggested, and they over-estimated their chances of being victims of crime (Gerbner & Gross; Gerbner et al.; Infante et al.). Gerbner concluded that television is highly effective in the cultivation process because it provides "a steady stream of mediated reality" (Gerbner & Gross). As noted in the introduction, more recent research (Hough & Erwin, 1997; Potter & Chang, 1990; Signorielli & Lears, 1992) has supported cultivation theory and shown that cultivation occurs well beyond violent programming. Potter and Chang found that heavy viewers of soap operas are more likely than light viewers to believe in the importance of luck and that the strong survive. In their particularly notable study, Hough and Erwin learned that children who were heavy viewers of television felt

more suspicious and at risk than children who were lighter viewers. They concluded that the *only* predictor of children's attitudes about television violence was the amount of *time* they spent watching television.

Despite all of the research that supports cultivation theory, the theory has encountered challenges. Hughes (1980) reanalyzed the data set from the original study and found that the data did not support the core assumption, which was that people who watched more television perceived the world as more dangerous. He also critiqued the data gathering method because the measures used to determine heavy viewing only related to exposure to television, not to what kinds of programs the viewers were watching. Hawkins and Pingree (1982) added to the criticism by reviewing 48 research studies that dealt with cultivation theory and concluding that there is only modest evidence to support the influence of television viewing on perceptions of reality.

Even though some of his later (1990) research supported cultivation theory, in his 1986 study, Potter concluded that initial attitudes and perceptions of individuals who are exposed to television may be more important than mere exposure to the medium. His conclusion contradicts Hough and Erwin's (1997) findings which assert that time spent with television is the only indicator of children's attitudes about television violence.

In response to criticism of the theory, Gerbner and his associates modified cultivation theory by introducing two factors—mainstreaming and resonance (Gerbner et al., 1980). Mainstreaming refers to the homogenous images projected on television, and the power of television to convey uniform, ritualistic messages. Resonance describes the powerful effect that television has on audience members when they see scenarios that they have experienced in their own lives on television (Gerbner et al.). The combination of mainstreaming and resonance amplify the effects of cultivation, Gerbner and his associates argued. Gerbner and his associates also admitted that the effects of television on viewers are relatively small, but cumulative. The more television a person watches, according to Gerbner and his associates, the more television

portrayals will begin to influence that person's views of reality (Gerbner et al.). In other words, television is an influence on cultural beliefs rather than a sole cause of them.

### Mediated Messages, Body Dissatisfaction, and Eating Disorders

While there is little recent research specific to the stories told on MTV, or to the influence that MTV alone has on adolescents, more general research on media influence on adolescents abounds (Currie, 1999; Durham, 1999; Preboth, 2000; Signorielli, 1997; Witt, 2000). Although most recent research is not specific to MTV, the channel is implicated along with other media in studies that examine adolescent eating disorders and body dissatisfaction (Durham, 1999; Gonzalez-Lavin & Smolak, 1995; Myers & Biocca, 1992), violence against women (Jhally, 1995; Wood, 2001), and violence more generally (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2001; Cromie, 1998; Mediascope Press, 2000; Shelton, 1996; Wood, 2001). Researchers have also implicated the media, including MTV, as contributors to the confidence slide that girls experience when they enter adolescence (Currie, 1999; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1995; Sadker & Sadker, 1995; Wood, 2001).

One of the most frequently cited problems for girls as they enter adolescence is body dissatisfaction, which sometimes leads to eating disorders and often leads to depression (Dittrich, 2001; Eating Disorder Awareness and Prevention [EDAP], 2001; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1995). The media are major contributors to body dissatisfaction because of the unattainable beauty ideals they present to girls. In contrast with persons in the actual world, 69% of the female characters shown on television are thin, and only 5% are overweight (Dittrich, 1998). Even Miss America has continually gotten thinner—the body mass index (BMI) of Miss America winners has steadily decreased since 1922 to a level that, for most winners in the past 30 years, lies within the range of undernutrition (Devlin & Zhu, 2001). Fashion models have also gotten thinner over the years—in 1962, the most popular models weighed 8% less than the average

woman in the U.S.; by 1992, the most popular models weighed in at 25% less than the average woman in the U.S. (Wood, 2001).

On one hand, the media show ultra-thin actresses and models, and strongly imply that thin is beautiful and valuable. In perverse contrast, on the other hand, they frequently show advertisements for fast food, candy, soft drinks, and snack foods. Over the course of a year, the average child will see 10,000 food advertisements on television, most of them for fast food or junk food (“Children see,” 1995). Researchers have asserted that it is difficult to be a healthy eater in our culture because we are encouraged, largely by the media, to consume without thinking of the consequences (Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1995; Wood, 2001). At the same time, we are taught, largely by the media, to admire and emulate people with “perfect” bodies. The definition of a perfect body for a female in our culture can be summed up in one word: thin. Many of us have heard the adage, “You can’t be too rich or too thin.” Sadly, some people die trying.

While it may be true that most people are dissatisfied with their bodies, more females than males report dissatisfaction. As many as 66% of U.S. women say they are dissatisfied with their bodies (Devlin & Zhu, 2001). At any given time, at least 70% of women claim to be dieting (National Eating Disorder Information Centre [NEDIC], 2001). Forty-to-sixty percent of high school girls perceive themselves as overweight and are actively trying to lose weight (EDAP, 2001), and 90% of White middle and high school girls reported body dissatisfaction in a recent survey (Wood, 2001). Even children and early adolescents (ages 9-14) who are not overweight express serious concerns about their bodies and fear gaining weight (Tanner, 2001). A study of 5-year-old girls found that the overweight girls (48 out of the 197 participants) suffered lower body self-esteem than the girls who were not overweight (Tanner).

Much of this body dissatisfaction is media-influenced. Several studies have found that adolescents who watch more television, or who try to emulate popular media figures, report more body dissatisfaction and are more prone to eating disorders than adolescents who do not watch as

much television (Felts et al., 1992; Gonzalez-Lavin & Smolak, 1995; Tanner, 2001). In one study, 69% of the girls surveyed said that magazine pictures influence their ideas of the perfect body shape, and 47% said they wanted to lose weight because of magazine pictures (Field, 1999). The majority of the girls in the study were unhappy with their weight and body shape—and the girls who read more fashion magazines reported the most dissatisfaction (Field). In their study of middle school girls, Gonzalez-Lavin and Smolak reported that the girls who demonstrated more body dissatisfaction, dieting, and eating problems reported that they were influenced by television's portrayal of attractiveness. In her overview of research findings on the media's influence on body dissatisfaction, Dittrich (1998) learned that 68% of a sample of Stanford students (both graduate and undergraduate) felt worse about their own looks after they read women's magazines (Burgard in Dittrich, 1998). Irving (1990) found that subjects exposed to slides of thin models consistently presented lower self-evaluations than subjects who had been exposed to slides of average and oversize models. Richins (1991) discovered that exposure to idealized images lowered subjects' satisfaction with their own attractiveness. Stice and Shaw (1994) determined that exposure to models who embodied the thin ideal produced shame, guilt, body dissatisfaction, and stress in subjects. Exposure to the thin ideal encourages people, especially females in our society, to feel like they are inferior, unattractive, and unsuccessful. These feelings of inferiority often influence women and girls to develop eating disorders.

Almost one third of high school girls have symptoms of an eating disorder ("Eating disorders: Update," 2001). In the U.S. alone, 5 to 10 million women and girls have active eating disorders (EDAP, 2001), and an estimated one-in-four college women has an eating disorder (Hicks, 1998). The most common eating disorders are bulimia and anorexia nervosa (Dittrich, 2001). Most people who are bulimic or anorexic—90 to 95% of them—are female (Dittrich, 2001). Bulimia, the most common eating disorder among young women, is characterized by episodes of bingeing, then purging food from the body by vomiting or using laxatives, taking diet pills, and fasting and exercising excessively and compulsively (Dittrich, 2001; Pipher, 1995).

Bulimia is often referred to as the college woman's disease because it tends to develop in later adolescence (Pipher). In contrast, anorexia tends to develop earlier in adolescence.

Characterized by starvation dieting, excessive and compulsive exercising, weight below what is considered "normal," and intense fear of weight gain, anorexia has the highest fatality rate of all psychiatric illnesses (Pipher).

For years, eating disorders were thought of as problems that White middle-to-upper class girls developed. A number of studies in the 1980s concluded that Black women and girls tended to be less dissatisfied with their bodies and less likely to develop eating disorders than White women and girls (Levinson et al., 1986; Thomas, 1989; Thomas & James, 1988). While the White beauty ideal valued thinness, the Black ideal valued women who were fuller-figured and more curvaceous. Unfortunately, recent studies have indicated that the White beauty ideal has spread into the Black community and beyond (Dittrich, 2001; Good, 1999; Lake et al., 2000; le Grange et al., 1998). In the last five years, Black female celebrities including Janet Jackson, Toni Braxton, and the members of Salt N' Pepa have become very thin (Dittrich, 2001). Other White beauty ideals, such as lighter skin color, soft, straight hair, and smaller facial features are embodied in successful Black models, such as Tyra Banks and Naomi Campbell (Wood, 2001). A writer for *Essence* lamented that "largeness...once accepted—even revered—among Black folks...now carries the same unmistakable stigma as it does among Whites" (as quoted in Dittrich, 2001). Dittrich (2001) quoted a striking 1995 Striegel-Moore study that found that Black adolescent girls had a *higher* drive for thinness than White adolescent girls, and that Black girls' drive for thinness was often brought on because they had been criticized for being too fat (as cited in Dittrich, 2001). Another more recent study (le Grange et al., 1998) found that Black women were both heavier and more concerned about their eating habits, and were more likely to have signs of eating disorders, than White women. In a study of rural middle and high school students, Splete (2001) found that the statement "I am usually preoccupied with being thinner"

brought “usually to always” responses from 34% of Black females and 31% of White females who were in middle school.

White beauty ideals are not only affecting Black culture. Dittrich (2001) found a study that asserted that minority girls were more likely to purge than White girls. In this study, Hispanic, Native American, and White high school girls were surveyed, and the researchers found that the two minority groups displayed more eating disordered behaviors than the White group. Another study Dittrich (2001) reported on found that the desire to be thin has grown in Japanese women over the last 20 years, and that more women in Japan are dissatisfied with their body size than ever before. In her own study, Dittrich (1997) found no ethnic differences in body image dissatisfaction in her sample of 234 women, which included 27 Latina women, 104 White women, 34 Black women, 49 Asian American women, one Native American, and 19 women who claimed to be of mixed ethnicity.

The Fijian Islands provide a case study in how White beauty ideals are spread by the media, especially television. Fiji had long been a food-loving society where people were actually chided for losing weight. All of that changed when American television programs (including *Melrose Place*, *Seinfeld*, and *Beverly Hills 90210*) were broadcast in the country (Good, 1999). Within three years, many Fijian women began dieting and developing eating disorders, and they cited women from the American television programs as their role models (Good). Television’s effect on Fijian women cannot be denied—the mere broadcast of American television shows imported White, American beauty ideals into their culture. One of the underlying themes of these shows—that White, American beauty ideals apply to everyone—was accepted and acted upon.

If one of the underlying themes in the media is that White beauty ideals apply to everyone, another is that women should *fear* being overweight. In a survey of third and fourth graders in Canada, most said they would rather lose a parent, get cancer, or live through a nuclear war than be fat (NEDIC, 2001). The fear of being fat is so entrenched in our culture that

many people, mostly females, resort to self-destructive behavior in order to become or remain thin.

Psychologist Melanie Katzman makes the claim that the media cause eating disorders by continually marketing the body as a commodity (as cited in MacDonald, 2001). Katzman asserts that the pursuit of thinness has become a new religion in our society and has pushed many girls over the edge. Dittrich (2001) contends that our culture supports self-destructive dieting behavior, largely through the media's portrayals of very thin actresses and models. Devlin and Zhu (2001) and Preboth (2000) assert that doctors must heighten their awareness of media influences to better understand and diagnose their patients, especially those with eating disorders.

Adolescent girls are in a unique position because they are only beginning to internalize the physical and social expectations placed on them by the media and the culture. Because they are only beginning to internalize these expectations, they are likely to look to television for answers and guidance because television is a major storyteller in our culture. When girls consistently see images of very thin females on television, the idea that only thin females are attractive is cultivated. The cultivation of this thin ideal can lead girls to develop low self-esteem at the very least, and in the worst cases, it could lead girls who are attempting to meet the thin ideal to develop dangerous eating disorders.

### Media, Dehumanization, and Violence

Some researchers (AAP, 2001; Andreason, 2001; Cromie, 1998; Gerbner, 1994; Jhally, 1995; Shelton, 1996) contend that the media normalize violence by repeatedly showing violent acts. A national television violence study (1998) found that 57% of programs from 1994 and 1995 contained violence, and one third of those programs contained nine or more violent interactions. A gun was used in one fourth of the violent encounters ("National television violence study," 1998). Shelton found that the average American child will see 8,000 television murders by age 12 and 200,000 acts of violence by the time he or she graduates from high



school. Media violence has been linked to a doubling in the nation's homicide rate, and epidemiological research suggests that if television technology had never been developed, there would be 10,000 fewer homicides, 7,000 fewer rapes and 70,000 fewer assaults in the U.S. each year (Shelton, 1996).

Music videos and lyrics, and, consequently, MTV, have been implicated as contributors to violence in our culture (AAP, 2001; Cromie, 1998; Jhally, 1995). Jhally paints a disturbing picture of the portrayals of women in music videos, and the ways these portrayals cultivate beliefs about what is normal and acceptable in our culture. Women in music videos are often shown in highly sexualized roles, such as strippers or exotic dancers, prostitutes, phone sex operators, cheerleaders, schoolgirls, lesbians, and bored housewives. Because 90% of all music videos at the time of Jhally's study were directed by men, women's voices about their own sexuality were being silenced, and male sexual fantasies were being acted out. Examined as a whole, the music videos displayed a "no means yes" mentality—even if a woman says she does not want sex, she actually does (Jhally). Jhally found that women were depicted as sex-obsessed and in constant competition for men, and they were portrayed as desperate and dependent people who would mope and fall apart if men were not around. A final scene in Jhally's report, which is represented in video format, shows clips of music videos juxtaposed with clips from the brutal rape scene in the movie *The Accused*. The music video depictions of women look strikingly similar to the brutal rape scene from the movie—the sexualized portrayals of women are not as obvious in the context of the full music video, but when shown in clips, the sexualized, degrading images of women are patently obvious. Jhally contends that these music videos dehumanize women and normalize danger and violence against women in our culture.

To buttress his claim, Jhally looked at surveys of people's opinions of rape and found that an astonishing 60% of men, and 40% of women, said that women provoke rape. Many of the men in the sample believed date rape was justifiable if a woman asked him out or was dressed suggestively, and 30% of the men said that it would do some women some good to be raped.

American Medical Association studies of 11-to 14-year-old children reveal even more disturbing statistics—51% of the boys and 41% of the girls said that forced sex was acceptable if the male had spent money on the female; 31% of the boys and 32% of the girls said rape was acceptable if the female had past sexual experience; 87% of the boys and 79% of the girls said rape was acceptable if the man and woman were married; and 65% of the boys and 47% of the girls said it was acceptable for a male to rape a female if they had been dating longer than six months (“Teenagers,” 2002). When high school students were surveyed, 76% of the males and 56% of the females said that forced sex is acceptable under some circumstances (“Teenagers”). What these statistics tell us is that danger and violence against women are normalized at a very young age.

The “dreamworld” of music videos cultivates the normalization of danger and violence against women by portraying women as people who want and deserve rape (Jhally, 1995). The lived-world statistics are that one out of every four women will be raped in her lifetime, and 29% of the rapes in the United States are of girls who are 11 years old or younger (Wood, 2001). A survey of U.S. college students found that 54% of the women surveyed had been victims of some form of sexual abuse, and that 42% of those victims told no one (“College students,” 2002). In that same survey, 35% of the men admitted that they would commit rape if they thought they could get away with it, and 43% of the men admitted to using coercive behavior to convince a female to have sex with them (“College students”). Approximately 30% of adolescents report that they have been bullied with sexual jokes, comments, and gestures at school (“Violence statistics,” 2002). The stories told about women in music videos dehumanize females and normalize sexual and general violence against them in our culture. The stories in music videos may cultivate the belief that violence against women is acceptable because women want and deserve rape and other abuse.

Some media critics argue that Black women are particularly dehumanized in music videos and lyrics (Brownsworth, 2001; Sanders, 1997; Shelton, 1997). Sanders mourned the fact

that so many Black women die in contemporary music videos: “Somehow images of violence and annihilation have become the most prevalent depictions of African American women in music videos, replacing the sexually exploitive parade of body parts—recalling a slave auction” (p. 160). Sanders goes on to claim that men cried “male bashing” when books like *The Color Purple* came out, but no one seems to care about the portrayals of Black women as “deathbed divas” (p. 160). She argues that young Black women need to be able to look to Black popular culture for positive reinforcement and a “reprieve from the images of blonde, blue-eyed, stress-free White female supermodels and housewives bombarding their subconscious daily” (p. 160), but they are not finding a reprieve in the music videos produced by Black artists. Shelton found that Black women in music videos are often portrayed negatively, as the celibate mammy, the hypersexual tragic mulatto, the weak hysteric, or the welfare mother. Brownsworth asserts that the lyrics of many rap songs also dehumanize women, and particularly Black women. At a recent film festival, Brownsworth was particularly disturbed by two films—both were Japanese and both depicted extreme sexual violence against women (the young women were stalked, kidnapped, raped, and murdered). Both films also featured a soundtrack of rap music that accompanied the sexual violence—“a pounding, grinding beat with crude lyrics that underscore the diminished humanity of women” (Brownsworth, para. 2).

A study for the Society for the Advancement of Education (Cromie, 1998) concluded that music videos may reinforce and perpetuate stereotypes of aggressive Black males and victimized White females. The study, conducted by researchers at Harvard Medical School, found that 76% of the videos in their sample contained violence, and that an attractive role model was depicted as the aggressor in more than 80% of the violent acts. Males and females were shown equally as victims, but males were more than three times as likely to be aggressors and White females were the most common victims (Cromie).

Music videos are powerful for adolescents—videos magnify the potential impact of a song, and they often contain excesses of sexism and violence (AAP, 1996). The American

Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Communications members (1996) assert that music videos may actually desensitize viewers to violence, potentially resulting in the creation of an environment in the lived world where violent acts are normalized and are viewed as legitimate means by which to accomplish goals. If people are desensitized to violence, they are likely to expect that violence will occur and to have lax attitudes about perpetrating violence against others. In a telling experiment, Waite, Hillbrand, and Foster (1992) found that eliminating access to MTV in a locked treatment facility actually decreased the frequency of violent acts among the adolescents in the facility. More recently, when women were attacked in Central Park after the Puerto Rican Day Parade in 2000, some began to wonder if MTV was to blame (“Central Park attacks,” 2000). Michigan State University professor Carl Taylor, interviewed in the *Christian Science Monitor* attested that the attacks were “the inevitable result of a commercial culture that has normalized ignorance and violence” (as quoted in “Central Park attacks,” p. 2). One of the greatest casualties of the normalization of ignorance and violence, Taylor contends, is respect for women (“Central Park attacks”).

#### Adolescent Girls’ Confidence Slide

If respect is not shown to women on television, chances are that respect for women is not shown in the culture. After all, television both “mirrors and leads society” (Signorielli & Morgan, 2001, p. 335). Media portrayals of people matter because they dictate how people are treated in our culture. Researchers (Dittrich, 2001; EDAP, 2001; Gerbner, 1994; Jhally, 1995; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1995) have illustrated a link between the media and two major problems that adolescent girls face—body dissatisfaction (and eating disorders) and violence. Researchers (Currie, 1999; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1995; Sadker & Sadker, 1995; Wood, 2001) have also found that when a girl reaches adolescence, her confidence begins to drop. The media, especially television, are cited as major influences of the confidence slide.

The confidence slide makes adolescence difficult for girls. “Like the tightening of a corset,” Sadker and Sadker (1995) write, “adolescence closes around these precocious, authoritative girls. They begin to restrict their interests, confine their talents, pull back on their dreams” (1995, p. 77). Pipher (1995) asserts that preadolescent girls will try anything; but when girls enter adolescence, the precociousness goes away, as if girls are being pulled into the Bermuda Triangle. This Bermuda Triangle effect takes place, Pipher argues, when girls move from being the subjects of their own lives to being objects of others’ lives. During adolescence, girls become “‘female impersonators’ who fit their whole selves into small, crowded spaces... Girls stop thinking, ‘Who am I? What do I want?’ and start thinking, ‘What must I do to please others?’” (p. 22).

At the onset of adolescence, girls can no longer get away with being androgynous—the culture prescribes that they should act “feminine,” and that means that appearance should be paramount and girls should be quiet, agreeable, sexual, sophisticated, fashionable, thin, beautiful, and not “too smart” (Pipher, 1995). Girls learn that boys get to *do*, while they are expected simply to *be* (Wood, 2001). Adolescence is the time when people and other agents of culture send girls the strong message that conformity is important and required, and anyone who does not conform will be ridiculed (Pipher). Adolescent girls who find cultural requirements difficult, or girls who simply do not fit the cultural requirements, are cast aside and made to feel inferior. Some develop eating disorders, many worry about being victims of violence. Most are dissatisfied with their own bodies. De Beauvoir commented, “to lose confidence in one’s body is to lose confidence in oneself” (as quoted in Pipher, p. 56). Most adolescent girls have lost confidence in themselves.

At the start of adolescence, many girls know they are sinking. They can feel themselves being pulled in different directions, and they know that cultural expectations for them are different from the cultural expectations for their male counterparts. Even children as young as 11 years old—boys and girls alike—have started to internalize the idea that females are inferior.

In Sadker and Sadker's (1995) landmark research on gender inequity in educational contexts, they studied 11-year-old children's perceptions regarding what it would be like if they woke up the opposite sex. Many girls wrote about how people would listen to what they had to say if they woke up as a boy. Boys, in contrast, wrote such comments as, "If I were a girl, my friends would treat me like dirt," and several boys said they would kill themselves if they woke up as girls (Sadker & Sadker, p. 83).

### Literature Review Summary

MTV is a channel that is widely viewed by adolescents, and its chief purpose is to deliver those adolescents to advertisers. Still, the channel has been positioned as the place to go to learn about what is happening in youth culture. MTV's programming tells adolescents in the lived world how to be considered cool.

Researchers have found that images that are repeated over time on television can cultivate beliefs in the lived world. Because adolescents so frequently watch MTV, it can be assumed that MTV's programming cultivates adolescents' beliefs about how they should look, act, dress, treat other people, and expect to be treated. The media have been implicated in studies about body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, violence and dehumanization of females, and the confidence slide that adolescent girls so frequently face.

The findings of this literature review led to the development of the research questions in Chapter 3 of this study. The questions address body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, the objectification of females and its relationship to diminished self confidence, violence, and the confidence slide. The research questions are answered in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, most research that is specific to MTV is not current, and research that specifically focuses on MTV's treatment of adolescent girls is virtually non-existent. In fact, most research that implicates MTV focuses single-mindedly on music videos and song lyrics, which only constitute part of MTV's total programming. Research on the channel as a whole, and the channel's portrayal of adolescent girls, is underdeveloped at best. Because of this lack of research, research questions abound.

The major areas of focus for this study are the ways that MTV programs may affect body dissatisfaction (and the eating disorders that often ensue), violence (and the fear of violence) against women and in general, and the confidence slide that girls face when they enter adolescence. The research questions for this study are:

1. What messages are MTV programs sending to adolescent girls about their bodies and appearance? (Within this question are a couple of additional questions: Are thin girls shown more often than healthy or overweight girls? Does MTV show diversity among adolescent girls, or does it promote the White beauty ideal as the best way to look?)
2. Does MTV programming portray adolescent girls as sexual objects who do not speak or contribute ideas?
3. Does MTV programming in which females appear contain violence? If so, does more sexual violence or general violence occur?
4. Does MTV programming contribute to the confidence slide by characterizing girls as background decorations?

The methods that were used to answer these research questions are described in the following chapter. The research questions are answered in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

This chapter explains the research methods used in this study. In addition to the methods, quantitative and qualitative categories and questions are listed. All of the questions served to answer the major research questions, which were listed in the previous chapter. Both the quantitative and the qualitative categories sought to answer questions about girls' ages, the programs in which they appeared, racial diversity, body size, clothes, roles, and whether the girls spoke in programming on the channel. Violence on MTV programming in which females appeared was also examined. The category that each question examines appears before the question in this chapter.

#### Description of Programming Sample

One way to truly learn the stories that are being told to adolescent girls through MTV's programming is to perform a content analysis of programs on the channel. For this project, I watched 26 hours of MTV programming and analyzed the content quantitatively and qualitatively. The programming was recorded so I could stop and rewind the video to ensure a more accurate account of the females who were on the channel.

The programming I analyzed was recorded August-November 2001. Dates were chosen randomly by using the form at <http://www.randomizer.org/form.htm> (created in 1997 by Geoffrey C. Urbaniak and updated in 2001 by Scott Plous), and times were chosen randomly from the pool of hours in which adolescents likely view the most television (any time on weekends and holidays, 3:00 p.m.-11:00 p.m. weekdays, according to Boush, 2001). Dates and times recorded and analyzed were:

- Sunday, August 26—3:00-5:00 p.m.
- Saturday, September 1—5:00-7:00 p.m.



- Sunday, September 2—10:00 p.m.-12:00 a.m.
- Thursday, September 6—8:00 p.m.-12:00 a.m. (A four-hour block was allowed for this date because the 2001 *Video Music Awards* debuted.)
- Tuesday, October 2—6:00-8:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, October 24—5:00-7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, October 27—9:00-11:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, October 31—8:00-10:00 p.m.
- Friday, November 2—3:00-5:00 p.m.
- Thursday, November 8—6:00-8:00 p.m.
- Friday, November 23—3:00-5:00 p.m.
- Sunday, November 25—2:00-4:00 p.m.

For this study, I was concerned about the stories told to adolescent girls through MTV's programming, including game shows, reality shows, artist specials, movies, MTV promotional advertisements, sports and music festivals, live artist performances, music videos and video request shows, and other specials.

### Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses

I hoped to answer my research questions through content analysis, and both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Largely, the purpose of the quantitative analysis was to quantify and add support to the qualitative findings, because I felt the research questions posed in Chapter 3 could best be answered qualitatively with some numeric support. For the quantitative analysis, I devised a series of questions and codes, as follows:

- Age: What is the female's approximate age group? (Determined by sight)
  1. 12-18 (Adolescents)
  2. 19-25 (Young women)
  3. 26-34

- 4. 35 and up
- 6. Unsure
- Programs: What kind of program is it?
  1. Music video
  2. Show (Game shows, video request shows, reality programs, specials such as the *Video Music Awards*, and sports shows)
  3. MTV promo commercial
  4. Movie
  6. Unsure
- Racial diversity/findings: What is the female's race?
  1. White
  2. Black
  3. Hispanic/Latina
  4. Asian
  5. Middle Eastern
  6. Unsure
- Size: What body size is the female? (Determined by sight)
  1. Thin (looks too small for her height/frame—"skinny")
  2. Healthy (looks like she is the appropriate weight for her height and frame)
  3. Slightly overweight
  4. Overweight
  6. Unsure
- Clothes: What is she wearing?
  1. Bikini (swimsuit) or underwear (bra and panties)
  2. Fully clothed (pants, skirt, shorts, t-shirts or tank tops, or dresses)
  3. Midriff exposed (stomach, beginning of hips shown)

4. Tight clothing (such as catsuits, spandex or skin-tight pants, dresses, shirts)
  6. Unsure
- Roles: What is the female's role in the program?
    1. Musician/band member
    2. Back-up singer
    3. Dancer
    4. Groupie
    5. Girlfriend/significant other
    6. Unsure
    7. Family member (mother, sister, daughter, grandmother, etc)
    8. Friend
    9. Guest/contestant
    10. Host
    11. Background
    12. Other (specify)
  - Speech: Does she speak?
    1. Yes
    2. No
    3. Makes background noises (such as giggling or cheering)
    4. Sings
    6. Unsure
  - Violence: Is violence shown in the program? (For this study, only overt violence such as rape, physically aggressive fights, shootings, and stabbings were counted.)
    1. Yes
    2. No
    6. Unsure

For the qualitative analysis, I focused on what females on MTV were saying and how they were spoken about, the contexts in which females on the channel were shown, and the types of violence that were shown on the channel. The specific questions that I answered for the qualitative analysis were:

- Speech: When a girl speaks on MTV, what does she say?
- Speech: If a girl is spoken about on MTV, what is said?
- Roles: In what contexts (or settings) are girls frequently shown on MTV?
- Violence: When violence is shown on MTV, is it sexual violence, or general violence? Who are the victims? Who are the perpetrators?

A trained assistant helped with data viewing and coding to ensure intercoder reliability in the quantitative segments of the analysis. Pre-coding tests determined a 93% researcher/assistant agreement rate. The quantitative data were entered into SPSS for analysis. Detailed notes (taken by the assistant and me) answering the qualitative questions were compared for the qualitative analysis.

### Methods Summary

Answering the quantitative questions in this study helped determine the magnitude of certain characteristics of the portrayals of girls on MTV. Answering the qualitative questions further clarified the context in which these portrayals took place. Further, the research questions were answered more thoroughly because both quantitative and qualitative analyses were used—the qualitative data provided contextual information while the quantitative data added support to the qualitative findings. This study's findings are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 explores the extent to which adolescent girls and other females are portrayed and characterized on MTV. The first section of the chapter illuminates the ways that adolescent girls are depicted on the channel. Young women are discussed in the second section of the chapter. In the third section of the chapter, the relationship between race and portrayals of

females on MTV is examined. Finally, violence is discussed in Chapter 5. Through the findings in Chapter 5, it becomes apparent that MTV is sending its viewers messages about the value of being female, and those messages are explored further in Chapters 6 and 7.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

While portrayals of adolescent girls were the original foci of the study, it became apparent that portrayals of young women were also relevant to adolescent girls because adolescent girls so frequently emulate young women in the lived world. Since there were differences in the racial diversity findings between adolescent girls and young women, it was important to examine the overall portrayals of females from all races. Finally, violence in MTV programming was examined across females of all ages and races to determine whether all females, or just certain types of females, were frequent victims of violence.

All of the categories examined (adolescent girls, young women, racial diversity, and violence) were divided into several sections. The adolescent girls' category was divided into sections about roles and speech, size, clothing, and racial diversity. The young women's category was divided into sections about roles and speech, size, clothing, and racial diversity. The racial findings category was divided into sections about roles and speech, size (with a special section about the proliferation of the White beauty ideal), clothing, and conclusions about the racial findings on MTV. Finally, the violence category was broken into racial findings, age, size, and programs. Within these sections, pertinent quantitative and qualitative data are presented. Dividing these findings categories into sections aided in applying the data to the research questions that are answered in the next chapter.

## Adolescent Girls

Because MTV is targeted to the adolescent audience, it is not surprising that adolescent girls are predominantly represented on the channel—they made up 46% of the total population examined (which was comprised of all females who were shown on the channel during the dates and times listed in Chapter 4).

### Roles and Speech

The majority of the girls, 69%, were shown in the background of programs. For example, they were standing behind the host of a show, or in the audience at a live taping or performance. It is interesting to note that the second largest role group for adolescent girls was singer or musician, but only 11% of the girls fell into that group. (The rest of the role categories for adolescent girls were disregarded because so few of the girls fell into other roles.) Most adolescent girls on MTV were shown standing in the shadows—they did not take an active role in the programming, and were merely used to decorate the sets. As unmitigated pieces of the background, 31% of the girls did not speak or make any noise during MTV programs. Fifty percent of the girls only made background noises, such as cheering for artists or hosts. Only 12% of the girls on MTV spoke. The remaining 7% of the sample consisted of girls who were shown singing.

While few girls on MTV spoke or were spoken to, they were spoken *about* regularly. When girls were spoken about on MTV, they were usually referred to as crazy fans or as sexual objects. During O-Town's guest appearance on *Total Request Live* (known on the channel as *TRL*), host Carson Daly told the screaming fans to "contain themselves," and referred to them as "ladies." He also commented jokingly that the show's directors had to fire teargas into the studio to keep the girls away from O-Town, and then laughed along with the band members. Ashley, a member of O-Town, said that he loved their fans, but some of the girls were "crazy." Trevor, another member of O-Town, complained that two years ago, females would not talk to him at all,

and now all the girls he meets want to date or marry him. Though he accepts their admiration, he is not blind to how vacillating fans can be. Members of groups like the Backstreet Boys and N-Sync also frequently described their female fans as crazy on MTV programs.

Males on MTV frequently speak of adolescent females in sexualized ways as well. Often on *TRL*, when a male audience member requested a video by a female performer, he justified his request through comments like “because she is so fine,” or “I’d like to try her out.” In one episode, a young man who requested a Jessica Simpson video replied that he would like to “break her in.” (Jessica Simpson is a performer who boasts her virginity and frequently states that she is saving her first sexual encounter for marriage.) During the *Sports and Music Festival IV (SMF IV)*, the male hosts referred to female skaters as “chicks with tricks,” and one host made slapping sounds and arm and hand motions (as if he were spanking someone) when the female skaters were being announced.

Most frequently, adolescent girls on MTV were depicted as fans who appeared in the shadows of the programs, cheering for their favorite celebrities. Furthermore, these girls were shown as *obsessed* fans who seemed more interested in adoring, and in many cases, marrying, their favorite celebrities than listening to the music those celebrities performed. On *Making the Band*, a reality show that followed the band O-Town, adolescent female fans were continually shown crying, screaming, taking pictures, and professing their love for individual band members. Many girls were shown holding signs with inscriptions such as “I live for O-Town” and “Ashley [or any of the other band members’ names]—you’re my angel.” Others were shown writing the names of the band members, the band’s logo, or song lyrics on their bodies—one young fan wrote “Property of Trevor [a band member]” across her forehead. Another fan demonstrated her extremist level of commitment to O-Town by having their logo tattooed across her back. When she met the band, she cried and gasped for air, but could not speak. The few fans who were shown speaking screamed sayings like, “I love O-Town,” “I want Ashley,” “A hug from one of



those guys would mean more than anything else in my lifetime,” or “If Ashley were my boyfriend, we would have sex every single day.”

One of the most important aspects of the show *Making the Band* was the *Making the Fan* contest. The contest took place in several cities, and the band members went to those cities and chose the most dedicated fan. To win, fans had to demonstrate their love for the band within a certain amount of time, and the fan deemed most creative in each city won. Only two males participated in the entire *Making the Fan* contest. All of the other hundreds of contestants were adolescent females. Some of the contestants tried to win the contest by stripping into bikinis and dancing suggestively, while others stood in front of the band members and cried. Some fans ran over and hugged the band members, while others showed off their O-Town memorabilia and wrote the band members’ names on their bodies. At the conclusion of the *Making the Fan* contest in every city, girls were shown chasing O-Town’s limousine as the band left.

The chase was also a theme in a couple of the music videos that featured adolescent girls. In Lil’ Romeo’s video for *My Baby*, the young rapper was chased by dozens of adolescent girls who, according to the lyrics, wanted to be his girlfriend. Finally, Lil’ Romeo (who is barely into his teens) settled for a bikini-clad Asian woman who was probably in her early- to mid-twenties. The adolescent girls continued to chase him until the end of the video. The band POD’s video for the song *Alive* also featured adolescent girls chasing males, and when they caught up to the males, they began kissing and making out with them.

Adolescent girls are also frequently portrayed as obsessed fans on the show *TRL*. When the Backstreet Boys were guests on the show, girls rushed the band and were fended off by large male bodyguards. When the members of N-Sync stopped by the *TRL* studio, girls were shown crying, holding their heads, and screaming. Adolescent girls were even shown screaming and jumping around frantically when Elton John—a gay singer who was performing before many of the girls were even born—appeared on the show.

In summary, girls were shown as fans in nearly every type of MTV programming. In music videos and live performances, on *TRL* and other shows, and even in promotional advertisements for the channel, girls were frequently shown as fans who cheered in the shadows of programs. Rarely did an adolescent girl who was portrayed as a fan speak, unless she was proclaiming her love for a celebrity; and rarely was an adolescent girl who was shown as a fan spoken to directly.

Adolescent girls on MTV were not shown in very diverse roles. Many were depicted as obsessed fans. Those who spoke on the channel professed their love for and desire to marry male celebrities. Even though many girls did not speak, they were spoken about negatively by males on the channel. Through males' comments, adolescent girls were either painted as obsessed, crazy fans, or as sexual objects to be consumed by males.

### Size

In addition to using few words, the girls on MTV took up little space. Most of the adolescent girls were either thin, which means that they looked too small for their height and frame, or healthy, which means they looked like they were the proper weight for their height and frame—47% of the girls were classified as thin, and 40% were classified as healthy. Only 2% of the adolescent girls in this sample were overweight, and 9% were slightly overweight (or “chubby”). The remaining 2% of the sample fell into the *unsure* category. For a breakdown of sizes across age groups, see Table 1 in Appendix A.

### Clothing

Girls on MTV were shown wearing a variety of clothing styles, but most of the styles showed off the body in some way. Sixty-one percent of the girls were wearing revealing clothing—they were baring their midriffs, or wearing swimsuits, underwear, or very tight clothes. Thirty percent of the girls in this sample were wearing clothes that revealed their

midriffs (the stomach, and sometimes the beginning of the hips), 18% of the girls were wearing swimsuits or underwear, 13% were wearing very tight clothes, and only 29% were fully clothed (meaning that their clothes were not tight and their midriffs were covered). Ten percent of the sample was disregarded because the researcher could not determine what the girls were wearing.

### Racial Diversity

Adolescent girls on MTV were relatively homogenous. Because the researcher had no information about the race or ethnicity of any of the females on MTV, determination of race was based on visual appearance. Sixty-four percent of the girls were White, while 19% were Black, 10% were Hispanic or Latina, 6% were Asian, and 1% were Middle Eastern.

### Young Women

MTV's portrayals of adolescent girls project strong messages about the rules of conduct and expectations for girls in popular culture; however, adolescent girls are not the only females shown on MTV. In fact, 48% of the women in this sample fell between the ages of 19 and 25 (young women), and this is perhaps the age group that adolescent girls admire and emulate the most. Many of the most popular female celebrities—including Britney Spears, the members of Destiny's Child, Shakira, Aaliyah, and Christina Aguilera—fall into this age category.

### Roles and Speech

While young women were portrayed in more varied roles than adolescent girls, 28% of them were relegated to the shadows of the background in MTV's programming. Still, more young women than adolescent girls were out in front of MTV audiences—24% of them were dancers, and 20% were musicians or singers. (The remainder of the role categories for young women were disregarded because so few young women fell into those categories.) Forty-eight

percent of the young women on MTV appeared in music videos, compared to the 22% of adolescents who were featured in music videos. The young women are the people who adolescent girl viewers are expected to admire and emulate, and, unfortunately, 63% of these young women did not speak or make any noise at all in the programs in which they appeared. Only 14% of the young women on the channel spoke, and 19% sang. The remaining 4% of the young women made noises in the background.

Although young women were shown in more varied roles on MTV than their adolescent sisters, their silence speaks volumes—they were on the channel to be seen, not heard. The young women were not shoved into the shadows of the background as often as adolescent girls, but they still remained silent. They did not contribute opinions or ideas to MTV programming—they contributed their appearance. With the exception of the young women who were shown singing, young women on MTV were quiet, and their silence was particularly disturbing. Though adolescent girls did not speak often, many of them made cheering sounds and background noises. Most of the young women did not even cheer. The silence of these young women tells the adolescent girls who emulate them that they should move silently into adulthood—that they should sit in the shadows while they are growing, and if they are “lucky” (which means thin and attractive enough), they will silently move into the spotlight (perhaps as a singer or dancer) when they become young women.

Like the adolescent girls, most young women did not speak, but were spoken about and treated as sexual objects on MTV. Examples of young women being spoken of and objectified sexually abound on the 2001 *Video Music Awards* (known on the channel simply as the *VMAs*). In the opening sequence of the show, the host, Jamie Foxx, slapped a young woman on the buttocks, or rear end, as he sang part of the Destiny’s Child song *Bootylicious*. He then made references to Jennifer Lopez’s rear end, and told P. Diddy, a former lover of Jennifer Lopez, “not to worry,” that Lopez will always belong to P. Diddy, even though Lopez has married another man. In N-Sync’s performance on the show, Justin Timberlake (a member of the group) slapped

a female dancer on the rear end and referred to her as his “sexetary.” The “sexetary” proceeded to strip down into her underwear as N-Sync performed. Ben Stiller, a guest on the show, did a skit where he said he was interrupted while “making a deposit in the First National Bank of Booty.” After Britney Spears’ performance, Foxx said she needed to put some clothes on, and told Timberlake of N-Sync, Spears’ boyfriend, that he is “doing good,” but he had better “get busy with that before I do,” referring to Spears. Not only were young women spoken of in more directly sexualized ways than their adolescent sisters—they were also touched in sexual ways, by having their rear ends slapped, for example.

### Size

Not only were young women on MTV more silent than adolescent girls, they were also thinner. Sixty-three percent of the young women in this sample were thin, 32% were healthy, 3% were slightly overweight, and only 1% were overweight. (The remaining 1% of the population fell into the *unsure* category.) While adolescents who were healthy were portrayed almost as often as adolescents who were thin, young women were most often portrayed as thin. Being thin overpowers being healthy by the time an adolescent becomes a young woman on MTV. As a way to test the association between size and age, I conducted a Chi-Square test of these variables after removing missing values and collapsing the 26-34 and 35 and up age categories so there would be enough cases in each cell to run a Chi-Square test. See Table 2 in Appendix A. The test results indicate that these variables are dependent on one another. In other words, it is highly unlikely that a disproportionate number of young women on MTV are thin simply due to chance.

Young women who were overweight, or even just slightly overweight, were subject to ridicule in MTV programs. In the opening sequence of the *VMAs*, a slightly overweight young woman danced, and Jamie Foxx, the show’s host, pointed to her legs and referred to them as “jelly.” After that, several thin dancers came out and joined the slightly overweight dancer.

During the *VMAs*, Foxx made numerous comments about how large Jennifer Lopez's rear end is, even though Lopez is not the slightest bit overweight. In the Bubba Sparxxx video for the song *Ugly*, overweight women were shown dancing to the song, which is about unattractive people. This ridiculing of women who were slightly overweight or overweight upholds the thin ideal and increases the importance of being thin, and the message is not ambiguous. For viewers, the ridicule may contribute to the belief that being thin is more important than being healthy, and it could influence them to develop eating disorders or to lose confidence in the appearance of their own bodies. This obsessive emphasis on appearance leaves little room for intellectual pursuits for females.

### Clothing

Young women on MTV wore even more revealing outfits than their adolescent counterparts. Most of them—77%—were wearing clothes that were revealing in some way—they were either in swimsuits or underwear, their midriffs were exposed, or they were in very tight clothes. Only 18% of them were fully clothed, while 33% were wearing swimsuits or underwear, 31% were exposing their midriffs, and 13% were wearing tight clothes. The remaining 5% of the sample fell into the *unsure* category because the researcher could not discern what they were wearing.

Females were encouraged to be thin and to show their bodies off by wearing revealing clothes on MTV. When Jamie Foxx, the host of the *VMAs*, told Britney Spears to put her clothes on after her performance, he made it obvious that he did not really want her to put her clothes on. The inference was that Spears needed to put her clothes on for her own protection because Foxx wanted her so badly, and his statement told viewers that Spears was wearing revealing clothes to entertain the males in the audience. Most of the female celebrities on the channel followed Spears' lead and were wearing very revealing clothes, and most of the other young women who were shown on the channel (across all programming) emulated those celebrities by wearing

revealing clothing themselves. While wearing revealing clothing may not be a problem in itself, the fact that so many of the young women on MTV are wearing revealing clothing is a problem because it is presented as the way that all females should dress. Wearing revealing clothing could lead girls in the culture to feel pressured to be sexual before they are emotionally ready to be sexual, and the prevalence of females in revealing clothing on MTV indicates that if a girl wants to be considered attractive and sexually available, she must show her body off by wearing revealing clothes.

### Racial Diversity

In contrast with the adolescent girls shown on MTV, most of the young women on the channel were not White. In fact, 44% of the young women were Black, while only 39% were White. The rest of the racial categories did not differ much between adolescents and young women—11% of the young women were Hispanic/Latina, 4% were Asian, and 1% of the population appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent. (Due to rounding, the percentages only equal 99.)

One of the more interesting findings about young women on MTV in this study was that the largest percentage of them were Black. While this finding may initially seem surprising, considering that only 19% of the adolescent girls were Black, and the vast majority of adolescents were White, it is important to note that a large portion of the young women in this sample appeared in music videos (48%). Many of the videos that MTV played were by artists who predominantly use Black dancers and models in their videos. In his live performance of *Girls, Girls, Girls*, Jay-Z used dozens of dancers who were young women, and the vast majority of those dancers were Black. Other artists like City High, O-Town, LFO, and Bubba Sparxxx predominantly used Black dancers and models in their videos. It is significant and interesting that there were more Black young women than White, but the statistics may be misleading

because such a large percentage of those Black women were concentrated in music videos by certain artists.

Just as adolescents were presented in very uniform ways on MTV, so were young women. Both adolescents and young women were portrayed as thin, quiet, supportive (as fans or dancers), and sexual. Like their adolescent sisters who did not conform to MTV's standards, young women who did not conform to those ideals were subject to ridicule and degradation. MTV's portrayals of adolescent girls and young women tell female viewers that to be valued they should be thin, quiet, supportive, and sexually available to males. They tell females that they should strive to conform to a particular ideal of femininity, and that they should walk silently into adulthood. While these portrayals are telling girls what is expected of them in our culture, they are also creating a cultural definition of masculinity by showing males as the people who make sexual comments about females, and depicting males as the people who are out of the shadows and in the spotlight on MTV programs.

### Racial Findings

Because of the differences between the adolescent girls' and young women's racial categories, it is important to examine race across all age categories to learn the complete story that MTV's programming tells about females and race.

Only 4% of the current study's sample fell into the 26-34 age group, and 2% of the females in the sample were 35 or older. While their numbers may not seem significant, it is important to include them in the examination of females and race on MTV so that our study of race is more accurate and complete.

Overall, 52% of the females in this sample were White, 32% were Black, 10% were Hispanic/Latina, 5% were Asian, and 1% of the females in the sample were of Middle Eastern descent. Although it may seem like the females on MTV were disproportionately White, compared to the statistics from Census 2000, they were not. According to the Census statistics,



75.1% of the people in the U.S. are White, 12.3% are Black, 3.6% are Asian, 12.5% are Hispanic/Latina, and no statistics are given for people from the Middle East (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Compared with these U.S. statistics, MTV actually presented a much higher percentage of Black females, a slightly higher percentage of Asian females, a slightly smaller percentage of Hispanic/Latina females, and a smaller percentage of White females.

### Roles and Speech

Regardless of race, many of the females who were shown on MTV were in the background. Females who appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent fared the worst—70% of them were shown in the background. Of Hispanic/Latina females, 53% were in the background, while 52% of White females, 49% of Asian females, and 34% of Black females appeared in the background of MTV programs.

Middle Eastern females' roles were the most limited—those who were not in the background were either guests on a show (15%) or dancers (5%). Asian women also had limited roles, with those who were not in the background serving as dancers (17%), girlfriends (9%), or guests on shows (9%). Only 2% of the Asian females in the sample were singers or musicians. Hispanic/Latina females were depicted as singers or musicians (12%), dancers (12%), or guests on shows (10%) if they were not in the background. Fewer Black females were in the background than females of other races, although there was still a large concentration of Black females in the background, and the ones who were not in the background were singers or musicians (22%), or dancers (20%). Of White females, those who were not in the background were singers or musicians (16%), guests on shows (9%), or dancers (8%). It is important to note that even though Black females had the largest percentage of singers and musicians, more White singers and musicians were shown on MTV (148 White singers and musicians were shown, compared to 129 Black singers and musicians); however, more Black dancers than White were

shown on MTV (115 Black dancers compared to 75 White dancers). Many of the role categories for all of the racial groups studied were disregarded because so few females filled them.

Interestingly, 25% of Middle Eastern females who were on MTV spoke, while only 15% of Asian females, 11% of Hispanic/Latina females, 12% of Black females, and 15% of White females spoke. So many Middle Eastern females spoke because MTV aired promotional commercials and specials about Afghanistan and the plight that females there face, as well as specials about racism against people of Middle Eastern descent in the United States. Still, it is important to note that 40% of the Middle Eastern females on MTV did not speak, and 35% of them only made noise in the background. Females, regardless of race, were usually silent on MTV.

### Size

As the statistics from the adolescent girls and young women indicated, there were not many overweight females on MTV, regardless of race. None of the Middle Eastern females in the sample were overweight, and only 2% of the females from each of the other four racial categories were overweight. The majority of White females (55%), Black females (56%), Asian females (57%), and Middle Eastern females (50%) were thin. Of Hispanic/Latina females, 46% were thin and 45% were healthy. See Table 3 in Appendix B for the breakdown of size categories among different races.

Most of the females on MTV programming, regardless of race, were thin. Even Black and Hispanic/Latina females, people who stem from cultures where fuller-figured women have been revered, adhere to the thin ideal on MTV. The thin ideal is traditionally a White ideal (Dittrich, 1997), and the adoption of this ideal across all races in this study indicates the imposition of White beauty ideals into other cultures. To test whether size and race were independent of one another, a Chi-Square test was performed after removing missing values and collapsing the Asian and Middle Eastern categories so there would be enough cases in each cell

to perform an accurate Chi-Square test. See Table 4 in Appendix B. The Chi-Square test found no relationship between the size and race variables; that is, size matters independently of race. On MTV, females' body size symbolically overpowers race. Because the majority of females of all races are shown as thin, females on the network appear homogenous. One size fits all females on MTV, because virtually all of the females, regardless of race, are thin on the channel.

### Proliferation of the White Beauty Ideal

Other indicators of the spreading of White beauty ideals into Black and Hispanic/Latina culture abound in MTV's programming. Some of the most frequently shown Black female performers—Destiny's Child (a group comprised of three young Black women), Janet Jackson, and the late Aaliyah—all are thin with long, straight hair (that is often blonde or streaked with highlights), lighter skin, and facial features such as small noses and thin lips that more closely represent the features of White people than Black people. Also, most of the Black females who appeared as dancers in music videos were thin and had more traditionally White features. Shakira, a Colombian artist who has sold millions of CDs in Spanish-speaking countries, dramatically changed her looks before she broke into the U.S. market. She dyed her hair blonde, lost weight, and started wearing clothes that revealed more of her body. In essence, Shakira made herself look like a White person when she entered the U.S. market, and the executives at MTV responded by playing her videos on the channel and asking her to present an award at the 2001 *VMAs*. Because many of the Black and Hispanic females who are depicted as beautiful on MTV adopt characteristics that are traditionally White, MTV is aiding in the proliferation of the White beauty ideal among females of other races.

## Clothing

Revealing clothing was the norm across the racial categories, with the exception of Middle Eastern females. Of Middle Eastern females, 45% were fully clothed, and 45% were showing their midriffs. Only 5% of the Middle Eastern females were in swimsuits or underwear, and another 5% were wearing tight clothes. Of White females, 26% were wearing swimsuits or underwear, 26% were fully clothed, 27% were baring their midriffs, and 13% were wearing tight clothes. The researcher could not discern what the remaining 8% of the White females in the study were wearing. The statistics do not change much for Black females—27% were wearing swimsuits or underwear, 25% were fully clothed, 30% were showing their midriffs, and 6% were wearing tight clothes. Twelve percent of the Black females fell into the *unsure* category. The majority of Hispanic/Latina women bared their midriffs (41%), while 14% wore swimsuits or underwear, 19% were fully clothed, and 8% wore tight clothing. As with the Black and the White females, it was difficult to discern what some of the Hispanic/Latina females were wearing, and 18% of them fell into the *unsure* category. Of Asian women, 18% wore swimsuits or underwear, 36% were fully clothed, 33% showed their midriffs, and 7% wore tight clothes. Six percent of Asian females in this sample fell into the *unsure* category.

MTV showed females from a variety of races, but they were shown in relatively uniform ways. As was the case with adolescent girls and young women, many females of all races who were shown on MTV were depicted as silent decorations who strived to be thin and sexy (by wearing revealing clothes), and who conformed as much as possible to the White beauty ideal.

## Violence

Overt violence (defined in this study as rape, physically aggressive fights, shootings, and stabbings) was not a major component of MTV's programming. Only 7% of the programming examined contained violence, which means that 93% of MTV's programming did not contain overt violence. Still, when violence did occur, it affected some groups of females more than others.

## Racial Findings

More Middle Eastern females were shown on programs that contained violence than females of any other race in this study—25% of them were shown in programming that contained violence. Of the other racial groups, 5% of the White females were on programs that contained violence, while 9% of the Black females, 4% of the Hispanic/Latina females, and 8% of the Asian females were on programs that contained violence.

The reason that a higher percentage of Middle Eastern females were in violent programming can be attributed to the promotional advertisements and specials that MTV created about Afghanistan and the plight that females there face, and to a special program about racism against people of Middle Eastern descent that is occurring in the United States in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks. The violence that was shown against Middle Eastern people was presented as deplorable on the MTV promotional advertisements and specials. Nevertheless, images of Middle Eastern females on MTV were largely associated with violence and violent programming. Middle Eastern females were not shown as often in regular, non-violent programming on the channel, and the images of Middle Eastern females that those portrayals present cannot be erased—from those portrayals, people in the lived world could cultivate the belief that females from the Middle East are accustomed to and expect violence, and that could affect the way they are treated in the lived world.

## Age

More violence took place around women who were in older age groups on MTV programming. In fact, the highest percentage of violence occurred in programs with women who were 35 years old or older—34% of those women were on programs that contained violence. Of 26-34 year olds, 19% were in programs that contained violence, while only 8% of the women between the ages of 19 and 25, and 3% of the adolescent girls, were shown in violent programming. On MTV's programming, adolescent girls appeared to be the safest group, although there was not much overt violence in MTV's programming overall.

The reasons that higher percentages of females who were older or overweight experienced more violence than younger females is not as easily explained as the reasons that more Middle Eastern females were depicted in violent programming. One explanation could be that older women were frequently shown on the show *Jackass*; and the women on the show tended to be mothers who were depicted as standing in the background observing violence. For example, in one episode mothers watched as their children beat a human piñata.

## Size

The chance that MTV females would be in programs that contained violence increased with the females' body size. Twenty-five percent of the females who were overweight and 10% of the females who were slightly overweight were shown in programs with violence, while 8% of the healthy females, and only 5% of thin females appeared in programs that contained violence. MTV did not show much overtly violent programming, but the violence that was shown on the channel more likely affected females who did not fit the thin ideal.

The show *Jackass* could also be the major context in which women who were overweight experienced more violence than thinner females—older women were frequently shown on the program, and a higher percentage of older women in this sample (16%) were overweight.

## Programs

Music videos contained more violence than any other type of MTV programming, with 12% of the videos containing violence. Eight percent of MTV's promotional advertisements contained violence, and only 3% of the shows (such as *TRL*, *Dismissed*, *Making the Band*, etc.) contained violence. It is interesting to note that music videos are the only form of programming that is shown, but not created by, MTV Networks. Still, MTV's programming executives decide which videos will receive airplay.

Overall, MTV programming contained little violence, but when violence did occur, females who were Middle Eastern, older, or overweight were affected more strongly than other females. Females were never victims of overt violence that occurred on the programs in this study, but older, heavier women were still more often associated with acts of violence than their thinner, younger counterparts.

Most of the violence on MTV was depicted as slapstick or deplorable (such as the examples that were shown of violence against people of Middle Eastern descent). Michael Jackson's Halloween Special, *Jackass*, and the episode during the *VMAs* where a woman beat the host up with her rear end were all examples of the slapstick violence that was shown on MTV. None of the shows featured overt violence that was actually perpetrated against women—the violence went on around them. In several music videos, such as *Ugly* by Bubba Sparxxx and *You Rock My World* by Michael Jackson, men fought while women danced around them, got out of the way, or laughed in the background.

## Findings Summary

These findings provide the means to answer the dominant research questions for this study in the next chapter. MTV programming sends girls very clear and strong messages about their bodies and appearance, as well as about their importance and roles. By showing mostly thin, White girls who are wearing revealing clothing, by showing males ridiculing overweight

females, MTV programming tells girls that to be taken seriously and valued, they must be thin; and because so many of the female role models are either White or are at least adhering to White beauty ideals, the belief that you must be White to be beautiful and, thus, valued, could be created. Through MTV portrayals, girls could cultivate the belief that they have very limited roles and importance—they must sit in the shadows of the background and cheer for males who are in the spotlight. Girls could also cultivate the beliefs that the best they can hope for is to be noticed, because of their beauty, by the right males. Males on MTV typically objectify females by treating them as sexual objects. While overt violence against females is not prevalent on the channel, girls are frequently dehumanized. The channel is also likely to contribute to the confidence slide by frequently showing females as silent members of the background, who rarely offer ideas and opinions, and who never get a chance to defend themselves against males who sexually objectify them.



## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the research questions for this study (listed in Chapter 3) are answered. The first research question concerning the messages MTV programs send to adolescent girls about their bodies and appearance is answered in the *Messages about Body and Appearance* section. The findings in this study demonstrated that MTV programming sends girls the strong message that to be considered beautiful, they must be thin and adhere to the White beauty ideal.

The second research question about whether MTV programming portrays adolescent girls as sexual objects who do not speak or contribute ideas is addressed in the *Silence and Sexual Objectification* section of this chapter. Girls were frequently portrayed and treated as sexual objects on MTV, and most of them did not speak or contribute ideas to the programs examined for this study.

The third research question asking whether MTV programming contains violence, and if so, whether more sexual violence or general violence occurs, is answered in this chapter's *Violence* section. The majority of the programming in this study did not contain overt violence, but females on the channel were frequently objectified, and, thus, dehumanized. This dehumanization of females could cultivate a climate in the lived world in which violence against females is not seen as a problem and is largely disregarded.

Finally, the research question that ponders whether MTV programming contributes to the confidence slide by characterizing girls as background decorations is addressed in the *Adolescent Girls' Confidence Slide* section of this chapter. Because the programs that were analyzed for this project overwhelmingly presented adolescent girls as background decorations who rarely spoke, and who were most often thin and White, it can be assumed that the channel is a major contributor to the confidence slide that girls face as they enter adolescence. The findings are

further examined in the *Discussion Summary* section, and Chapter 7 is briefly previewed at the end of this chapter.

### Messages about Body and Appearance

The MTV programs examined in this study send strong messages to adolescent girls about their bodies and appearance. The adolescent girls shown on the channel were most likely to be thin and White. Very few girls on MTV were overweight or even slightly overweight.

Because most of the girls on MTV were thin and White, a very narrow ideal of beauty is presented on the channel. According to the programming that was viewed for this study, girls of other sizes and races are less likely to be shown on MTV than thin White girls. This lack of inclusion of other races and sizes leaves girls who do not fit the thin White ideal to stand out when they are shown because they do not represent the regular beauty norms that are pushed through MTV's programming, and it encourages girls of all races to adopt the White beauty ideal. Girls like singer Mandy Moore and the members of the group Dream are adolescent girls who are presented as role models, and all of them are thin and White. Girls who are overweight, or even just slightly overweight, are not portrayed as role models—they are often ridiculed, shoved into the background of programming, and treated as exceptions to prove the rule (and the rule is that thin is the best way to be if you are female). Adolescent girls who are not White are not often portrayed as role models either.

As a network, MTV is sending girls the strong message that they should be thin, and the concept of thin is narrowly defined—to be thin enough, an adolescent girl must appear to be medically underweight. Earlier studies that implicate MTV as a contributor to body dissatisfaction are congruent with the findings in this study—the thin ideal is entrenched in MTV's programming. These constant depictions of thin girls cultivate the belief that adolescent girls should not even be slightly overweight. These depictions carry over into the lived world, and they have very powerful consequences for adolescent girls—studies have determined that

almost one third of all high school girls have symptoms of an eating disorder (“Eating disorders: Update,” 2001).

Many researchers have found that exposure to the thin beauty ideal (the ideal so prevalent among girls on MTV) causes people to feel guilt, shame, and dissatisfaction in their own bodies (Burgard in Dittrich, 1998; Irving, 1990; Richins, 1991; Stice & Shaw, 1994). Studies specific to adolescent girls have determined that adolescents who watch more television, or who try to emulate media figures, report more body dissatisfaction and are more prone to eating disorders than adolescents who watch less television (Felts et al., 1992; Gonzalez-Lavin & Smolak, 1995; Tanner, 2001). Given these researchers’ findings, one can conclude that adolescent girls who are heavy viewers of MTV may feel more body dissatisfaction than girls who do not watch the channel often, and the girls who are shown on the channel (who are generally thin and White) cause female adolescent viewers to feel guilt, shame, and dissatisfaction with their own bodies. By showing so many thin females in their programming, MTV executives are promoting the idea that being thin is more important than being healthy.

In addition to being thin, adolescent girls on MTV are most likely to be White. If they are not White, they are likely to adhere to White beauty ideals. Most Black girls, and many Hispanic/Latina girls, who appear on MTV are thin, even though they come from cultures that traditionally appreciate fuller-bodied females. Most of the Black female performers (including Janet Jackson, the members of Destiny’s Child, and Alicia Keys) have long, straight hair (that is often blonde or streaked with lighter highlights), thin bodies, lighter skin, and smaller facial features—features that more traditionally characterize White females than they do Black females (Wood, 2001). This study supports the findings of other researchers who have found that White beauty ideals are spreading into other cultures (Dittrich, 2001; Good, 1999; Lake et al., 2000; le Grange et al., 1998). The portrayals of females in MTV’s programming are facilitating the spread of the White beauty ideal among females of other cultures because most of the females

who are shown are White, and so many of the Black celebrities that are highlighted have features that are more often associated with White people than Black people.

The spread of the thin ideal, along with the fact that many females of other races adopt traditional White characteristics, suggest that the White beauty ideal for females dominates on MTV. The message that is sent to adolescent girls through MTV's programming is that your body must be thin and you must either be White or take on the characteristics of White females to be considered attractive.

### Silence and Sexual Objectification

MTV programming usually portrays girls as sexual objects who do not speak or contribute ideas to the programs on which they appear. Most of the adolescent girls who are shown on MTV wear clothes that are revealing in some way, and they are spoken about in very sexual ways. Males on the channel often comment about how "fine" certain female celebrities are, or they talk about "trying her out," or "breaking her in." Even girls who are participating in sporting events (on *SMF IV*) are subjected to sexual comments and innuendo and are referred to as "chicks," "girlies," and "ladies" by male hosts. These sexualized comments are packaged as compliments, and the insinuation is that girls should feel proud and honored when males refer to them in sexual terms.

Most of the girls do not have the chance to respond to the sexual comments that are made about them on MTV because the majority of them do not speak at all (only 12% of the girls on the channel speak). Because they are not speaking, girls are not able to verbally defend themselves or contribute ideas to MTV's programming. As objects, the adolescent girls on MTV cannot react. Because girls are not shown responding to the sexual comments that are made about them on MTV, the strong message that girls can be harassed, and that girls are supposed to enjoy being sexually harassed by males, rings loud and clear. The message for girls is that they should aspire to be sexually harassed, because if they are being harassed it means they are being

noticed by males. For so many of the females on MTV who are shown cheering or dancing suggestively for male celebrities, being noticed by males is the ultimate goal.

Unfortunately, the outlook for girls does not improve as they enter young womanhood. Portrayals of young women on MTV teach girls that they should silently enter adulthood. Young women on the channel are even more silent than their adolescent sisters—63% of them do not speak or make any noises at all. Like adolescent girls, young women predominantly wear revealing clothes and are spoken about in very sexual ways on MTV. Often, they are slapped on the buttocks by males in programs. Young women are also referred to in sexual ways, such as when Timberlake calls a young woman his “sexetary” during a performance, and when Foxx says he wants to “get busy” with Britney Spears.

Young women, the group that adolescent girls admire and emulate, are depicted in even more sexual terms than adolescent girls. Young women are frequently touched and slapped on their rear ends by males on MTV. Through these depictions, adolescent girls are taught not only to accept and aspire to sexual comments, but also to *expect* males to touch or slap them if the males find them sexually desirable. Another lesson for girls is that if males find them desirable, this should be taken as a compliment—females should aspire to be sexually desirable to males. For adolescent girls, the effects could be devastating. Consistent portrayals of adolescent girls and young women as sexual could cultivate the belief that adolescent girls in the lived world should be sexual as well. This idea and expectation could lead girls in the lived world to feel pressured to become sexually active before they are emotionally ready, which could lead to unrequited emotional attachments and relational complexities and confusion that girls are ill-prepared to handle because of their lack of maturity and life experience. The expectation for girls to be sexual could also lead males in the lived world to expect adolescent girls to be constantly ready for, wanting, and able to handle the repercussions of sex.

### Depictions of Violence

Much of the violence that researchers found in earlier studies (APA, 1996; Cromie, 1998; Jhally, 1995) of music videos appears to be gone. MTV programming contains significantly less violence than previous studies predicated. The violence that is shown is typically portrayed as buffoonery and occurs in shows like *Jackass* or Michael Jackson's Halloween Special, or in videos like Bubba Sparxxx's *Ugly* or Pink's *There You Go*. When there is violence, it is most likely to be in a music video, but still only 12% of the music videos examined for this study contained violence. Most of the violence that is shown is not aimed at one particular gender. For example, there are several physically aggressive fights. There are no instances of overt sexual violence against women in the analyzed programming. Still, it is important to note that some females on MTV are sexually harassed verbally and physically, for example, by all of the comments made about them by males, and by the men who slap some of the females on their rear ends. While this treatment of females is not considered overt violence, it creates an environment where females are dehumanized. If females are dehumanized in our culture, they are more likely to be victims of overt violence, and the violence that is perpetrated against them is more likely to be seen as acceptable and consequently disregarded. By dehumanizing females through portrayals that depict them as silent sexual objects, MTV programming could cultivate beliefs in the lived world that females are inferior and it is acceptable for males to hurt females if they are not cooperative.

Females who are Middle Eastern, overweight, or older are more likely to be in violent programs than younger, thinner females of other races. One reason for the prevalence of violence in shows with Middle Eastern women, as noted in Chapter 5, is that MTV produced promotional advertisements and specials about the plights females face in Afghanistan and the racism against Middle Eastern people in the United States. Violence against Middle Eastern females is portrayed as despicable and ignorant, so even though violence is shown, it is shown in

a negative light. Nonetheless, the fact that Middle Eastern females are most often shown in violent programs cannot be ignored because it cultivates beliefs and expectations, which were discussed in Chapter 5, about them in the lived world. One possible explanation of why more older and overweight females are in violent programming, also discussed in Chapter 5, could be that older women (many of whom are overweight in MTV programming) are shown in the background of shows like *Jackass* where violence (that is supposed to be buffoonery) is going on around them, but not against them. Adolescents are the least likely group of females to be in programming that contains violence, with only 3% of them appearing in violent programs.

Even though females on MTV are not victims of overt violence, and very few are shown in violent programming, it could be argued that the portrayals of females on MTV programming create a climate where violence against females is not seen as a serious problem. Girls are frequently sexually objectified and shown as silent members of the background in MTV programs. Real world statistics (“College students,” 2002; Jhally, 1995; “Teenagers,” 2002) tell us that both males and females (adult and adolescent) believe that women provoke rape in certain cases, and Jhally asserts that the dehumanization of females in music videos contributes to those attitudes. So while MTV programs do not contain much overt violence, the dehumanizing depictions of females on MTV could lead to violence against women, or at least a relaxed attitude about violence against women, in the lived world.

#### Adolescent Girls’ Confidence Slide

MTV’s programming overwhelmingly presents adolescent girls as background decorations. Add to this the finding that many of them do not speak, and half of them only cheer and make background noises, and it is apparent that adolescent girls on MTV have no voice. MTV programming contributes to the confidence slide that adolescent girls face by putting them in the background of programs and representing them either as silent, or as cheering for celebrities.

Frequently, adolescent girls are portrayed as obsessed fans whose chief hope in life is to marry a celebrity—males get to be celebrities while girls get to stand in the background and cheer for them, adore them, and hope to be noticed by them. Not only do these portrayals tell girls that they cannot be celebrities—the portrayals tell girls that the only way they can get status is by being with the right male. Shows like *Making the Band* (through the *Making the Fan* contest that is part of the show) teach girls that to win the attention of the right male, a girl must be manipulative and competitive. It seems that the most important goal of many of the adolescent girls on MTV is to win attention from males, and since so many of the adolescent girls are in the background of programs, cheering loudly and frantically is the only way they will be noticed.

By cheering for male celebrities, girls are taking a supportive role on MTV. Their purpose is to make male celebrities feel welcome and wanted. While girls on MTV are watching male celebrities participate in activities, such as performing music or hosting a show, they are relegated to the background. Females get to sit and watch males while males get to participate. Because adolescent girls are not in the forefront of MTV programs, and they so rarely speak, their ideas and opinions are not heard, and they assume a strictly decorative role. They are taught to stay in the background and allow other people—usually males—to stand in the spotlight. Even though girls are pushed into the background, they are expected to look beautiful, which means, according to cultivated MTV ideals, that they need to be thin, White-looking, and wearing revealing clothing. Girls in the lived world who do not fit this ideal may become dissatisfied with their bodies or skin color and develop eating disorders and depression. MTV promotes the adoption of the thin, White beauty ideal, and the promotion of that ideal contributes to the confidence slide for some girls.



### Discussion Summary

The findings of this study lend support to other researchers who implicate MTV as a contributor to the confidence slide that girls face when they reach adolescence (Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1995; Sadker & Sadker, 1995). Adolescent girls are portrayed as backdrops who, as true members of the background, rarely speak, and who are most often thin, White, and portrayed as sexual objects. Because so many of the girls in MTV programs are so much alike, the images of adolescent girls that are shown on MTV create a prototype of what all girls are supposed to be like. This lack of diversity, and the glaring absence of strong, intelligent, assertive girls, cultivates the beliefs that girls should be quiet, compliant, supportive, and non-assertive; and that to be beautiful, a girl must be thin, White, and sexually available to males. True alternatives to this beauty ideal are rarely shown. Girls on MTV do not contribute their opinions or beliefs to programs. A girl's main contribution a program is her appearance, and this emphasis on appearance influences many adolescent girls to focus their attention on, and derive their self-worth from, their physical beauty. Because most girls feel they do not measure up (Wood, 2001, reports that 90% of White middle and high school girls report body dissatisfaction), this focus on appearance sends them further down the confidence slide. They move from *being*, or taking an active role in their own lives and pursuing varied interests, to *seeming*, or impersonating society's unrealistic expectations for females.

In the next chapter, a summary of the answers to the research questions that were offered in this chapter is adduced, as well as limitations of this study, and ideas for further research. Some concluding thoughts inspired by this study are also presented.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, key points from the *Findings* and *Discussion* chapters are further stressed in the *Summary* section. From there, limitations of this study and suggestions for further research are explored. Final thoughts about this project are offered in the *Concluding Thoughts* section.

#### Summary

MTV programming sends girls strong messages about their appearance, roles, and importance. Programs on the channel continuously reinforce beliefs that thin is beautiful, that being thin is more important than being healthy, and that every female, regardless of race, should aspire to White beauty ideals. Females on MTV who are not thin and White, or at least aspiring to the White beauty ideal, are not portrayed as beautiful. The same beauty standards are held to females in the lived world.

Through programming on the channel, MTV executives send girls the message that their contribution to the world is their appearance—they are expected to sit silently in the background, look pretty, and allow males to talk about them in sexual terms. In fact, according to the portrayals on MTV, girls should feel proud when a male reduces them to sexual references, and they should aspire to such references, for example, by trying to be sexy and appear available. These portrayals affect girls in the lived world by cultivating beliefs that females should enjoy sexual harassment; and, while MTV does not frequently show overt violence, portrayals of females enjoying and aspiring to harassment create a climate where the dehumanization of women is normalized and celebrated.

Girls in MTV programs are generally depicted as silent and supportive members of the background. The only way for a female to gain status is by attracting the attention of a male who has status. Many of the girls on the channel are shown trying to attract the attention of male celebrities by cheering. The way to win the attention of a male with status, according to MTV portrayals, is to be competitive and manipulative. While girls on MTV are busy trying to win the attention of males, males are participating in activities like singing, playing music, and hosting shows. By showing males participating in activities while females obsessively try to win their attention, MTV programming contributes to adolescent girls' confidence slide. Portrayals of adolescent girls on MTV tell girls that they should define themselves in terms of their physical appearance and their relationships with males, who are indifferent to their emotional, intellectual, or psychological needs.

The programs on MTV serve to create a prototype of what girls are *supposed* to be like, and there is a dramatic lack of strong, assertive, intelligent girls. Girls on MTV are small—they do not take up much space—and they are silent members of the background who are frequently objectified by males. Their small size, along with their silence, makes females on MTV seem weak and powerless. Frequent portrayals of females as weak and powerless could cultivate beliefs and expectations that females in the lived world should be weak and powerless as well.

The best that females on MTV can expect is merely to be visible. Girls on MTV are usually small and silent. They do not contribute ideas or opinions to shows. They are set decorations and vehicles through which males on the channel can express their heterosexuality and virility. Girls on MTV are presented as uni-dimensional, rather than as the multi-dimensional beings that all humans are in the lived world.

Young women, the group that adolescent girls often admire and emulate, fare even worse in MTV programs. As adolescent girls become young women, the indicators of disempowerment increase—they become more silent, thin, and revealingly dressed, and they are verbally and physically harassed sexually. These portrayals have direct, cumulative effects on

females in our culture, such as the confidence slide, body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, and sexual consequences.

### Limitations of this Study

Throughout this study, efforts were made to keep limitations to a minimum. Still, some emerged. One of the limitations, inherent in all content analyses, is coder (or researcher) bias. Steps were taken to reduce the chances of bias (a research assistant helped with coding, and pre-coding tests determined a 93% agreement rate). Bias is still possible, however, because some of the most important coding categories—age, body size, and race—were based on sight rather than specific information such as birthdates, weight, and ethnic background. Because these categories were based on sight, they were difficult to operationalize; however, care was taken to ensure that age, body size, and race classifications were consistent among all females who were coded as part of this study. The use of a research assistant decreased the chance of bias further because more than one person was coding and analyzing the data.

Another limitation of the study is scope. A thorough content analysis of every program and advertisement shown on MTV would take years. For this study, commercials that were not produced by MTV were not examined. Even though many commercials are shown on MTV, the focus of this study was programming that was produced and selected by people who work for MTV. Most of the commercials that are made for MTV are based on the programming that the executives at MTV decide to show on the channel.

Even though this study has limitations, the findings present important information about ways that adolescent girls are portrayed in programs on MTV and the meanings and consequences that these portrayals present for girls in the lived world.

### Suggestions for Further Research

Because there has been little MTV-specific research to date, there are many opportunities for future research. One critical area of needed inquiry regards the portrayals of adolescent males on MTV in order to uncover the kinds of beliefs MTV programming cultivates (in both males and females) about adolescent boys. While my study did not focus on males, it appeared that depictions of males in MTV programming were as uniform as the depictions of females (males were loud, dominant, heterosexual, and sexually hungry). Just as portrayals of adolescent girls and other females are important and have consequences in the lived world, so do portrayals of adolescent boys and other males; each in their own right, because maleness and femaleness is understood in relationship to each other.

Some of the other people who appear on MTV and who could be examined are the artists and celebrities who are frequently shown on the channel. Through those studies, we could discover whether videos from male or female artists are played more often, or whether males or females most often perform live or serve as guests or hosts on the channel. From that research, we could ascertain the criteria MTV programming executives use to decide which artists and celebrities are featured on the channel. The proportion of males to females who are shown on the channel could also be gleaned from that research.

Researchers could also examine the stories told by non-MTV produced commercials that are placed on the channel, or they could expand on this project and talk to adolescent girls to examine how the portrayals of girls on MTV affect them in their every day lives.

MTV is a channel that 73% of adolescent boys and 78% of adolescent girls watch for at least six hours a week (Cromie, 1998). More MTV-specific research is necessary so we will know what kinds of messages the adolescents who watch MTV are receiving about themselves, other people, and the world around them. This project is a start, but more research is needed if we are to truly know the stories that programs on MTV are telling adolescents in our culture.

### Concluding Thoughts

This study illuminates the ways that adolescent girls are pushed out of the spotlight and into the shadows on MTV. The girls are shown in the shadows of the background, many opening their mouths only to cheer for males who are in the spotlight, and most not speaking at all. They are mostly thin, White, and wearing revealing clothing. They are talked about by males, either referred to as crazy fans or as sexual objects. They rarely contribute their ideas or beliefs to the programs on which they appear. Adolescent girls are shown standing behind males, in their shadows, cheering them on in MTV's programs. The girls are merely a backdrop for males' actions. Many girls in the lived world go down a confidence slide when they become adolescents. They become quiet and withdrawn, backing into the shadows. Most are dissatisfied with their bodies because they believe they are overweight. Some develop life-threatening eating disorders. MTV has a major influence on adolescent girls because so many of them watch the channel. The programming on MTV contributes to their body dissatisfaction and the confidence slide that so many of them go down because girls are portrayed in such narrow roles on the channel.

Adolescent girls are a silent group on MTV, and in the lived world, and it is the responsibility of researchers and other adults to make sure their voices are heard and their needs are met. Now that we know how adolescent girls are portrayed on MTV, and that these portrayals affect girls in the lived world, we have a responsibility to demand changes in the programming shown on the channel.

MTV has a mixed record on change. In the beginning, videos by Black artists were not shown on MTV, and now Black artists are shown quite often. MTV executives apparently listened when researchers and media critics spoke out about violence in music videos, because only 12% of the videos in this study contained violence. Unfortunately, MTV has been slower to change when gender issues are concerned. When Jhally (1995) released *Dreamworlds 2*, instead of listening to his arguments and making changes to the programming, MTV executives tried to

have the results of the study, which are presented in a video, banned. Media critics (see, for example, Brownsworth, 2001; Sanders, 1997; Shelton, 1997) have been writing about the dehumanization of women on MTV (and in music videos) for years, and females are still frequently dehumanized in MTV's programming. Perhaps if we move the focus from portrayals of women to portrayals of adolescent girls and young women specifically, people who happen to make up a large portion of their target audience, MTV executives will make changes to the programming and show adolescent girls in more diverse, assertive, and authoritative roles.

The most effective way to produce change on MTV is to convince executives that they will be hurt financially if they do not show adolescent females in more positive roles, and this is no easy feat. Companies who sponsor shows and purchase advertising space on MTV have a vested interest in maintaining the current image of adolescent females on MTV—these companies have items like shoes, jeans, hair products, cosmetics, and skincare products to sell. As long as MTV portrays girls as background decorations who need to be attractive, the companies will continue to sell their products. Kalle Lassn, the director of the Media Foundation, summarized the state of media in the United States when he said that “you can't speak up against the sponsor” (as quoted in Jensen, 2001, p. 5). Lassn goes on to say that we “have been reduced to spectators, consumers. We're discouraged from actively participating in society” (as quoted in Jensen, p. 6). Researchers and media professionals have the power to create change in the media. Perhaps through public education and grassroots efforts, adolescents (both females and males) can be rallied together and convinced that adolescent girls deserve to have more positive, realistic role models on MTV. If adolescents rally together and demand change, MTV (and their advertisers) will have the economic incentive to present girls in more positive roles.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Age and Size Tables

Table 1:  
Size Distributions by Age

<u>Size</u>						
<u>Age</u>	Thin	Healthy	Slightly Over-weight	Over-weight	Unsure	Total
12-18	394	328	76	18	14	830
	47%	40%	9%	2%	2%	100%
19-25	548	283	25	9	6	871
	63%	32%	3%	1%	.6%	99.6%
26-34	39	27	5	4	0	75
	52%	36%	7%	5%		100%
35 & up	8	13	6	5	0	32
	25%	41%	19%	16%		101%
Unsure	0	3	0	0	0	3
		100%				100%
Total	989	654	112	36	20	1811
	55%	36%	6%	2%	1%	100%

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*Note.* Due to rounding, not all percentages equal 100.

Table 2:

## Adjusted Distribution of Size by Age with Estimated Residuals

<u>Size</u>					
<u>Age</u>	Thin	Healthy	Slightly Overweight	Overweight	Total
12-18					
<i>n</i>	394	328	76	18	816
%	48.3%	40.2%	9.3%	2.2%	100%
Residual	-57.4	30.9	24.9	1.6	
19-25					
<i>n</i>	548	283	25	9	865
%	63.4%	32.7%	2.9%	1.0%	100%
Residual	69.5	-31.9	-29.2	-8.4	
26 & up					
<i>n</i>	47	40	11	9	107
%	43.9%	37.4%	10.3%	8.4%	100%
Residual	-12.2	1.0	4.3	6.8	
Total	989	651	112	36	1788
	55.3%	36.4%	6.3%	2.0%	100%

*Note.* Pearson Chi-Square = 82.945,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = .000$ . Somers'  $d = -.104$ . Missing values were removed, and the 26-34 and 35 & up age categories were combined so that each age group would have a sufficient number of cases to run the Chi-Square test.

## APPENDIX B

### Race and Size Tables

Table 3:  
Size Distributions by Race

<u>Size</u>						
<u>Race</u>	Thin	Healthy	Slightly Over-weight	Over-weight	Unsure	Total
White	516	314	66	23	15	934
	55%	34%	7%	2%	2%	100%
Black	325	217	27	7	3	579
	56%	37%	5%	1%	.5%	99.5%
Hispanic/ Latina	84	82	10	4	2	182
	46%	45%	5%	2%	1%	99%
Asian	52	30	8	2	0	92
	57%	33%	9%	2%		101%
Middle Eastern	10	9	1	0	0	20
	50%	45%	5%			100%
Unsure	2	2	0	0	0	4
	50%	50%				100%
Total	989	654	112	36	20	1811
	55%	36%	6%	2%	1%	100%

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*Note.* Due to rounding, not all percentages total 100.



Table 4:

## Adjusted Distribution of Size by Race with Estimated Residuals

<u>Size</u>					
<u>Race</u>	Thin	Healthy	Slightly Overweight	Overweight	Total
White					
<i>n</i>	516	314	66	23	919
%	56.1%	34.2%	7.2%	2.5%	100%
Residual	8.4	-21.3	8.4	4.5	
Black					
<i>n</i>	325	217	27	7	576
%	56.4%	37.7%	4.7%	1.2%	100%
Residual	6.9	6.8	-9.1	-4.6	
Hispanic/Latina					
<i>n</i>	84	82	10	4	180
%	46.7%	45.6%	5.6%	2.2%	100%
Residual	-15.4	16.3	-1.3	.4	
Asian & Middle Eastern					
<i>n</i>	62	39	9	2	112
%	55.4%	34.8%	8.0%	1.8%	100%
Residual	.1	-1.9	2.0	-.3	
Total	987	652	112	36	1787
	55.2%	36.5%	6.3%	2.0%	100%

*Note.* Pearson Chi-Square = 15.604,  $df = 9$ ,  $p = .076$ . Missing values were removed, and the Asian and Middle Eastern categories were combined so that Chi-Square could be calculated.

## APPENDIX C

### Shows and Music Videos Analyzed

#### Shows

*Who Knows the Band?* (2 episodes)

*Making the Band* (4 episodes)

*Dismissed* (2 episodes)

*Total Request Live (TRL)* (5 episodes)

*Diary* (3 episodes—Aaliyah, Kobe Bryant, and Ja Rule)

*Sports Music Festival IV (SMF IV)*

*Ghosts* (Michael Jackson's Halloween Special)

*Making the Video* (2 episodes—No Doubt and Lil' Kim, Christina Aguilera, Mya, and Pink)

*MTV News Special: Best of VMAs Uncensored*

*Jackass* (2 episodes)

*Latest and Greatest—Spankin' New Videos*

*Bangin' the Charts*

*MTV Icon Janet Jackson*

*Real World Back in NYC* (2 episodes)

*TRL End of Summer Countdown*

*Flipped*

*Video Music Awards (VMAs)*

## Music Videos

*Hero* by Enrique Iglesias (4 times)

*Rock the Boat* by Aaliyah

*Don't Stop* by Mariah Carey

*Alive* by POD (3 times)

*In too Deep* by Sum 41 (2 times)

*Fat Lip* by Sum 41

*Get the Party Started* by Pink (3 times)

*There You Go* by Pink

*You Rock My World* by Michael Jackson (2 times)

*Thriller* by Michael Jackson

*Wherever, Whenever* by Shakira (2 times)

*Wish You Were Here* by Incubus

*Gone* by N-Sync (5 times)

*Slave 4 U* by Britney Spears (4 times)

*We Fit Together* by O-Town

*All or Nothing* by O-Town

*Son of a Gun* by Missy Elliott and Janet Jackson (2 times)

*Chop Suey* by System of a Down (2 times)

*In the End* by Linkin Park

*Superman* by Five for Fighting

*Ain't it Funny* by Jennifer Lopez

*If You Had My Love* by Jennifer Lopez

*I'm Real* by Jennifer Lopez and Ja Rule (2 times)

*Dig in* by Lenny Kravitz (2 times)

*Fly Away* by Lenny Kravitz

*Break Yo' Neck* by Busta Rhymes  
*Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Can See* by Busta Rhymes  
*Caramel* by City High (2 times)  
*Emotions* by Destiny's Child  
*Ugly* by Bubba Sparxxx (2 times)  
*This is How You Remind Me* by Nickelback  
*Young N'* by Fabolous  
*Izzo* by Jay-Z  
*Hey Baby* by No Doubt  
*Stay Together for the Kids* by Blink-182  
*Control* by Puddle of Mudd (2 times)  
*Irresistible* by Jessica Simpson  
*My Baby* by Lil' Romeo  
*Every Other Time* by LFO  
*This is Me* by Dream  
*Boiler* by Limp Bizkit  
*Ghost of You and Me* by BB Mak  
*When it's Over* by Sugar Ray  
*Like a Feather* by Nikka Costa  
*I Wanna Be Bad* by Willa Ford  
*In My Pocket* by Mandy Moore  
*Here's to the Night* by Eve 6

## VITA

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East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;  
Professional Communication, M.A., 2002
- Professional  
Experience: Development Assistant, Barter Theatre, 2000  
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Communication, 2000-2002  
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