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"Real" Women:
A Study in Body Acceptance

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Table of Contents

Illustrations

Figures

Abstract

My thesis is about body acceptance. Not the kind that is forced upon us by radio and TV, or by Internet ads and spam emails, but the kind that comes from loving your body the way that it is, naturally. I have created a series of paper dolls depicting the standardized female body shapes of inverted triangle, rectangle, pear, hourglass and oval. These shapes are used by the fashion industry to define women's bodies so that designers can sell more clothes. The object of body shapes in my project is just a means to show an identifiable diversity of women's bodies.

My paper dolls do not come in a book to be cut out from a page and played with. They stand on their own away from the page, rebelling against their format. They rebel against standards set by other paper dolls. Like women, they are objects of desire, subject to the same critical gaze but they respond by looking back and acknowledging the viewers gaze with their own. They interact with the viewer's memories of childhood moments in play and fantasy but still maintain the visual aesthetic of art. Each doll stands in front of a box with found art in the form of vintage women's underwear ads. Using these methods, I explore standards of beauty and body image in a lighthearted manner.

Introduction

My thesis focuses on the idea of beauty in one's self-acceptance, no matter the size or shape of a woman's body. I have created paper dolls in the form of five body shapes often used by the fashion industry to describe women's bodies. These shapes are: Hourglass, Oval, Inverted Triangle, Rectangle, and Pear. Each doll is roughly 42 inches tall and will be displayed in front of 48 inch boxes decorated with enlarged vintage women's underwear ads. Each ad represents the absurdness of media standards.

I want to depict women of varying body types to show the varied dimensions of women even though they are being portrayed in a two-dimensional manner

I will argue in this paper that women can be confident and secure in their bodies even with media messages stating to the contrary. Placing these constructed paper dolls in front of boxes that contain vintage advertisements is a way to represent a mode of thinking that resists media-set standards of beauty. It is to say that the era of the girdle is behind us and liberation is in the form of self acceptance and comfortable clothing. I will explore how the media influences women's perceptions of their bodies, and the modern definition of beauty. I will look at social media and how it has become a gathering place for people with similar beliefs to share ideas and inspiration with each other. I will also discuss the art of the pinup and how it relates to women's body image. A brief history of the paper doll is included as well as a chapter summing up my use of social media to change the way that women see themselves.

In a sense, each of the paper dolls will live in her own space in the installation. Each doll represents an individual every day woman with a different body shape; each is an independent personality who enjoys a variety of every day activities. They are not

supermodels cut from the pages of a fashion magazine. Significantly, each woman is vulnerable and exposed in underwear or tight-fitting clothing that they would not necessarily wear in public. Being exposed in this manner strips away the bulk of clothing and allows the viewer to see the women as naturally as possible. Without this burden of heavy clothing, viewers can see and appreciate the body shape of the doll and the woman it represents before them.

As another facet of this project, I started a blog on the same subject to which details my project. I wanted to share what I found with other people in the hopes of connecting with women who also suffer with insecurities about their bodies. The feedback has been overwhelming. People I have never met before email me telling me that they appreciate what I am doing and that they are inspired by my project. Right now, my blog readers are few, but blogs are constantly changing the way that people get their information. I can share links with other sites and I believe that my own blog will change and gather more of an audience.

While my blog began initially as a means to collect my work, notes and thesis progress, however, instead of the resistance and criticism I was expecting, I have received support and excitement from the larger Internet community. This fuels my motivation. I want to represent women in a positive light in my thesis, so that we can get beyond pointing fingers and shame and appreciate each other as well as ourselves. I imagined that this would be a simple project, but in undertaking it, I found that I most importantly, I can help myself. While I cannot say that I am purely motivated by the desire to help other women, this thesis project has proved to be a personal journey for me.

I have struggled with shame and humiliation by my peers, especially my female peers. I would also like to think that the media has no influence on my perception of my own

7

body, but it is tough to keep your head held high when you are bombarded with messages that you are just not good enough. It is tougher still when it is other women that tell you that you are not good enough. Instead of celebrating our accomplishments, we're too busy degrading each other. Some fat women belittle thin women with chants of "REAL women have curves!" and some thin women use the word "fat" as an insult to belittle fat women. Degrading each other solely on the basis of our looks is not conducive to living happily! If women change the way that they interact with each other by becoming more compassionate, they can positively change the way that they see themselves.

Real Women: A Study in Body Acceptance
Chapter 1
Media, The Body and the Definition of Beauty

We are bombarded with morning talk shows and commercials that tout the next and best pill or shake or surgery that will make us thin and beautiful. Each tells us that to be truly happy, we have to have the perfect bikini body, toned, tanned and ready for the

(Fig. 1) Screen capture from Special K's "What Will You Gain When You Lose?" promotional website.

beach. Need to lose weight? There is an app for that.[1] Have unsightly bulges? Squeeze yourself into a pair of Spanx™ girdles and your rolls will magically disappear!

One of these, Special K's new campaign, "What Will You Gain When You Lose?" aims to motivate women to lose weight so that they can see their true potential.[2] Significantly, these advertisements use key words like "Self-Worth" and "Passion" to motivate women to lose weight. The promise seems to be, that if you acquire an active lifestyle, obtain a healthy weight, in turn, you will gain the self worth and passion you lost when you the gained weight. This message promotes the idea that anyone who is over the ideal of a fit body cannot have these powerful ideals central to an individual's identity as a complete person.

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1   Apple filed a trademark for the phrase "There's an app for that" in December 2009 and the line is used in Apple's marketing and advertising. The phrase has become so popular, that it is often used in pop culture references and casual conversation. Dave Caolo, "Apple Trademarks 'There's An App For That,'" Tuaw, The Unofficial Apple Weblog, entry posted on October 11th, 2010, http://www.tuaw.com/2010/10/11/apple-trademarks-theres-an-app-for-that/
2   Kellog Company, "New Special K 'What Will You Gain When You Lose' Campaign Challenges Women to View New Year's Resolutions in a New Way", Press Release, December 28, 2010. http://kelloggs.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=318 (Accessed April 1, 2010).

In 1998, television actress Calista Flockhart caused a media sensation, however, when she appeared at the Emmy Awards in a backless dress. The sensation was not because the dress was scandalous or revealing, it was her very thin arms and back that had Hollywood's tongues wagging. That same year, the *Ally McBeal* star told *People* magazine "I guess I don't know the exact definition of anorexia, but I eat. I eat normally. I eat whatever I want, whenever I want. I don't have a messed-up relationship with food. Am I anorexic? I guess my answer would have to be no." [3] Flockhart was the basis of media-wide scrutiny about her body. She was under what was considered "ideal" and obviously had to have an eating disorder. On one hand, we have a company telling a woman that if they are fat, there is no way that they could pursue a happy life and have "self-belief." On the other hand, if an actress doesn't fit the ideal body in a way that conforms to what has been promoted as an acceptable shape, she must have something wrong with her. There is no such thing as "just right" when it comes to women's bodies and the media.

So, what after all, is beautiful? Beauty is sometimes defined by what appeals sexually to another human being. In some cultures, a woman with broad shoulders and wide hips means that she's a hard worker and thus is more appealing to a mate. In others, a thin, tanned woman is revered because she has wealth and status and this makes her more appealing. In her book, *The World Has Curves*, Julia Savacool discusses multiple theories on the topic of the ideal body. One theory is the human desire to propagate our species and where the ideal body is one that is fertile and suitable for reproduction. Another theory that is suggested is the we find what is familiar to be more attractive. For example, Savacool states that some sociologists state that our brains are like digital cameras. They take a mental photo of all the faces that we have come into contact with our entire lives. Each new face we

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3   Karen S. Schneider, "Arguing Her Case" People Magazine Online, http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20126712,00.html (Accessed April 1, 2011).

see is recorded and cataloged with the others. But not as an individual image. Each face we record is compiled on top of all of the others in our memory and our brains compose a composite image of all the male and female faces that have been recorded. The resulting composite is what we are attracted to. Another theory that is reflected in Savacool's book is taken from Naomi Wolf's 1991 book, *The Beauty Myth.*[4] That the ideal bodies isn't a case of biology, but have resulted from a "full scale attack on women's positions in society." Wolf correlates that the rise of the cosmetics industry in the 60's and 70's to the rise in women returning to the workforce. If women were not purchasing vacuum cleaners and kitchen appliances, what could they buy? If women were kept in a state of self-hate, they would purchase more and more beauty products to overcome the feeling of self-hate, and the cycle would continue. Women felt like they had to keep themselves sexualized to be taken seriously by their male counterparts. Women today do not know what it is like to have to apply to a college where some degree programs were reserved for men but we know how to identify a sexist remark, and we know that we are just as smart as the men we work with. It seems that the higher that women rise in the workforce, the more they feel they have to invest in their appearance.[5]

In Western economies, the media[6] plays an important role in influencing the way some women see themselves. Images of thin models in fashionable clothing and covered in makeup bombard us wherever we go, including magazines, television commercials, train stations and bus stops. These images are almost everywhere. The general consensus is that tall, thin and blond is the ideal body image. These advertisements seem to be saying that if a

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4   Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*. [London: Chatto & Windus, 1990].
5   Julia Savacool, *The World Has Curves: The Global Quest for the Perfect Body.* [New York: McMillan, 2009], 5-14.
6   Media is defined here as the main means of mass communication (esp. television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet) regarded collectively.

woman is thin, she is happy, healthy and desirable to the opposite sex. Significantly, however, If a woman is the opposite of this standard, she's considered lazy, slovenly or has a lack of will power.[7]

One ideal vision of beauty is a version of a woman that sells products. An unattainable form that women strive to achieve. There cannot possibly be a single individual who possesses this ideal of perfection that would fit the media's standards. This supports the concept of the "ideal." A body that cannot be attained. Female celebrities are either too fat or too thin, too bony or too lumpy. It would be impossible to be happy with the way that they could look because tabloid magazines would swiftly pick apart any flaw. On the

(Fig. 2) *Vintage advertisement for Spirella foundation garments,* 1948. Spirella Corset Company

same token, even if a celebrity felt comfortable in her skin, any magazine would happily Photoshop her body into a more acceptable shape.

I chose vintage ads as the background for my dolls because they represent a time when the fashion industry actively sought to urge women to mould themselves into certain shapes. I am not saying that modern media does not do the same thing. But it seems that advertisements use such absurd and sexist wording and imagery to sell their products. For example, a faceless woman sells you underwear. A woman is tethered by strings from a hand

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7   Sarah Grogan, *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women, and Children.* 2nd ed. [London: Routledge, 2008], 11-13.

outside of the photo (in an obvious display of control) and is told that she can be a "living doll" if she wears a certain brand of constricting foundation garments. Advertising of the era reflected stereotypical social roles for women. They were expected to stay home and be mothers and wives, tend the home and leave the full time jobs to the war veterans.[8]

While contemporary advertisements still use sexist themes to sell their products, the visuals that are used are far subtler than advertisements from the middle half of the 20th century. Ad agencies use subtle sexist imagery instead of the more blatant sexist wording of the older advertisements. Looking back, it is easy to see that the advertisements of the 1950's and 1960's are beyond reprehensible. We would like to think that our society has changed in the last 50 years when in reality, it is just the visuals that have changed.

While my thesis focuses on print media for its physical presentation, television has been a major influence on my criticisms of media portrayal of body image issues.

Television programs like "The Biggest Loser" shame and humiliate its contestants into losing 100 plus pounds by making them stand on a larger-than-life scale in tight fitting clothing for the female participants and topless and shorts for the male participants. At weigh-ins, dramatic music is played while the contestant waits for the result of their work for the week. If the contestants do not lose enough weight for the period, they are eliminated, and if they do exactly as they have been instructed, they are rewarded. Humiliating people in this manner portrays fat people in a negative light in order to obtain sponsorship dollars and attention. "Heavy" A&E network's docu-drama is another example; this show follows twenty-two obese people that face "extreme consequences as a result of their obesity." Each hour-long episode focuses on two individuals during their six-month treatment program of exercise and lifestyle change. While the show may seem to showcase

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8   Miller, Melody L., Phyllis Moen, and Donna Dempster-McClain. "Motherhood, Multiple Roles, and Maternal Well-Being: Women of the 1950s." *Gender and Society* 5, no. 4 (December 1, 1991).

the contestant's struggles in a more positive light, it still targets fat people as an outlet for entertainment. Programs like these continue to use the body image struggles of fat people for profit.

While definitions of beauty are subjective and often change with the personality of the observer, media will always have an influence over women unless they take back control of their own bodies. The only people who should be defining what is "ideal" or what is beautiful, are the people looking in the mirror. Advertisers will continue to berate us with images of women that are somehow better than us. They may seem richer, thinner, or more beautiful. But once women start to be more critical of the things we are seeing on television and in magazines, the better off we will be when it comes to loving our bodies.

Chapter 2
Social Media As Community Support

Common digital gathering places like blogs, other social media sites such as

Facebook, have been an extraordinary source of first-person information for my thesis.

(Fig .3) *People Magazine cover featuring singer Jessica Simpson,*
February 2009. *People Magazine*

These online gathering places have become an easy way to share information quickly to a

broad audience. I have had an opportunity to read a number of blogs like "Corpulent"[9] and

"The Rotund"[10], that focus on body image and how it pertains to contemporary culture.

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9   Frances Lockie, "Corpulent", Size Acceptance Blog, http://corpulent.wordpress.com/ (accessed April 1, 2011).
10   Marianne Kirby, "The Rotund", Size Acceptance Blog, http://www.therotund.com/ (accessed April 1, 2011).

There is a focus on changing the world and how people see themselves and each other, and I want to use this same energy in my thesis work. I want to demonstrate that women can all be beautiful regardless of shape and size. Negative talk that women use to belittle one another should to be redirected to a more positive outlet, like fighting the way that advertisers use message of self-hate in their commercials. Social media of all forms, Twitter, Facebook, Blogger, can be a powerful tool to fight against the oppression of these unacceptable body standards.

Moreover, with the rise in popularity of social media[11] sites like Facebook and Blogger, images of people of varying body shapes can be spread throughout the world at a moments notice. With that being said, the information is not always negative. As the twenty-first century unfolds, social media sites like Facebook and Blogger make it easier for women to access different ways of thinking about their bodies with the blogs "Corpulent", "The Body Image Project" and "The Rotund" which seek to reach out to people dealing with body negativity. These three blogs are based on the Fat Acceptance movement and the blog operators are using social media to promote acceptance of people who the mass media seem to be saying would generally say were not worth paying attention to.[12] Much of what they have to say is in response to the "obesity epidemic."

Using these blogs and my own thesis process as motivation, I started a blog of my own. While it started out as a place to upload process images and factual information, it quickly grew into a space where I could vent my own disappointment over advertising and

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11   Social media is defined by three characteristics: 1. The majority of the content is user generated. 2. There is a high degree of participation and interaction between users 3. The website easily integrates with other web sites. Social media sites include blogs like Blogger, WordPress and Typepad. Social networking sites include Facebook, Linkedin, MySpace and photo and video sharing sites like Flickr, Vimio and YouTube. "Social Media – A Definition" http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/amy/2010/01/21/social-media-%E2%80%94-a-definition/ (accessed April 1, 2011).
12   The Fat Acceptance movement argues that fat people are the targets of hate and discrimination in the media, medical field and society in general. The movement seeks to alter the attitudes of fat people and the media through activism and education.

critical women.

While all of this progress is exceptional and inspirational, it seems to be all inclusive

at the same time. While the Fat Acceptance
movement (FA) is helping women overcome
stereotypes and take control of their bodies,
it leaves out average-sized women and
women who may even be considered under
weight.

While the media may want to
exclude women who do not meet their
standards of beauty, I believe that does not
mean women who are not thin. There are
plenty of women who are considered under
weight based on the same beauty standards

(Fig 4.) *Life & Style magazine cover*, April 2011. *Life & Style Magazine*

and who are met with comments of "eat a sandwich" or "you must be unhealthy." This can

send negative body images to thin women who struggle with accepting their bodies as well.

Significantly, thin women are not excluded from feeling the pressure to stay thin.

A slogan often used by larger women is "Real women have curves." This

communicates the notion that the only "real" women are fat women, and that their thinner

counterparts are fake, that thin women have never had to address body image issues. An

article on Huffingtonpost.com by Starre Vartan describes a thin woman's reaction to the "real

woman" label and how it leaves anyone under the average to plus sized spectrum out of the

body empowering movement.[13] Finally, labeling only perpetuates the divide between

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13   Starre Vartan, "On Objecting to Plus-Size Women Being Labled as 'Real," http://www.huffingtonpost.com/starre-vartan/on-objecting-to-plus-size_b_628336.html (accessed March 11, 2011).

women.

Are women harder on each other in terms of body acceptance than the media? Does the media use our own insecurities to pit each of us against each other to further their goals of selling us products, many of which we do not need?

The Health at Any Size (HAES)[14] movement touches on the same topic of body acceptance. Its goal is to not focus on the size of a person's body, but to adopt and to maintain a healthy lifestyle through intuitive eating and activity. Intuitive eating is a process of relearning how to have a healthy relationship with food. Participants learn to respond to internal body cues to rely on when to eat, rather than eating when they are distracted or emotional. This changes the relationship between person and food. HAES focuses on the beauty in the diversity of our bodies and helping people change their relationship with food so they can banish the cycle of yo-yo dieting and live a happier and healthier life. While there is no "healthy weight" goal set by followers of HAES, the goal is to encourage people to stay active while learning to love the nuances of their bodies. They maintain that when one lives a healthy lifestyle, one can achieve a healthy outlook.

Social media has been closely scrutinized for its negative influence on some people, but I believe that it has a integral part to play in furthering a body positive outlook. I have witnessed a number of women being positively influenced by reading comments from others who have suffered and overcome some of their own body insecurities. By sharing my own stories and photos to other women, social media has helped me relate to a broader range of women and assisted in spreading the message that I'm trying to convey.

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14   The Health At Every Size movement promotes healthy eating and exercise while rejecting the constraints of diet and weight loss. People learn to accept the human body in all its varying shapes and sizes, learn that engaging in pleasurable and social activities that they enjoy is more productive than strict exercising and that by acquiring a new approach to eating by listening to the body and its cues, one will eventually change their relationship to food and body image. Health At Every Size http://www.haescommunity.org/ (accessed April 1, 2011).

Chapter 3
The Pinup

Illustration was at the height of necessity and popularity in the late 19th century and early 20th century when photography was in its infant stages. Illustrators were the eyes of war time reporting, they were depicting fashionable clothing in magazines and creating beautifully rendered works of art in inexpensive newspapers. With the increase of readership of magazines, and the modernization of printing techniques, companies found more opportunities to advertise their products, and in turn, hired illustrators to create their images. Advertisements would use provocative imagery to sell

(Fig 5) *Marine Venus fresco,* House of Venus, Pompeii, painted before 79 A.D.

products by using an attractive woman in a suggestive poses. These images would be then be torn out of magazines and attached to a wall, usually by young G.I.'s. This is how the term "pin up" was coined.[15]

One might say that pin up art has been around as long as human civilization. Paleolithic sculptures of voluptuous women have been found and anthropologists disagree whether they were symbols of fertility or erotic talismans. Erotic paintings have been found in Pompeii in the form of frank and sexual murals in public marketplaces until Christianity deemed the images pagan and drove the it underground.

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15   "The History of Pin-Up Art" The Art History Archive http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/pinupart/ (accessed April 1, 2011).

I have been drawing women as pinups for several years. Women with thick thighs, large breasts and wide hips are the focus of these illustrations. Women who don't fit into the stereotypical beauty ideal are largely ignored in pin up art. I believe nerdy women who like to collect comic books or records, curvy, ample-bodied women who fish, bowl or have obscure hobbies can be sexy doing what they love. They should be represented in a manner that reflects this sexiness, without having to be overtly sexual.

While underground artists like Coop and Les Toil are popular for showcasing voluptuous women in their art, Coop usually are portrays the women that he creates in a highly sexualized state.[16] I want to showcase empowered, smart and attractive women. It is their brains and the confidence that makes them sexy, not their overt sexuality.

Pin up art is also a great way to subvert the genre. Historically, idealized women were painted to appeal to men. But women started using this medium in the 1970's to reclaim their sexuality and take control of their own image.

(Fig. 6) Chris "Coop" Cooper, *Devil Girl.* 1999

This turned women from being passive receivers of the dominant male gaze to powerful creators of their own image.

Photographer Cindy Sherman's work mirrors my thesis work by willingly putting herself in the viewers path, where the gaze is invited and each woman reflects her own body image in the eyes of the viewer.

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16   Mark Yarm, "Coop:All the Best Curves", *Flak Magazine* http://www.flakmag.com/features/coop.html (accessed April 11, 2011).

Hal Foster wrote of Sherman in his book *Return of the Real*: *Art and Theory at the*

End of the Century:

> Her subjects see, of course, but they are much more *seen,* captured by
> the gaze. Often, in the film stills and the centerfolds, this gaze seems to come from
> another subject, with whom the viewer may be implicated; sometimes, in the rear
> projections, it seems to come from the spectacle of the world. Yet often, too, this
> gaze seems to come from within. Here Sherman shows her female subjects as self-
> surveyed, not in phenomenological immanence *(I see myself seeing myself)* but in
> psychological estrangement *(I am not what I imagined myself to be)*. Sherman cap-
> tures the gap between imagined and actual body images that yawns in each of us, the
> gap of (mis)recognition where fashion and entertainment industries operate every
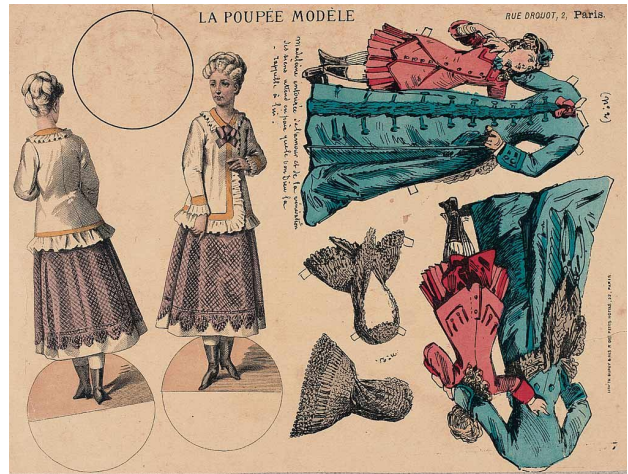> day and night.[17]

(Fig. 7) *Untitled Film Still #21*, Cindy Sherman. Gelatin silver print, 7.5 x 9.5 in 1978

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17   Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* [Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1996], 148.

Chapter 4
The Paper Doll

The first manufactured paper doll was Little Fanny which was produced by S&J Fuller, London in 1810.[18] The boxed paper doll sets were produced in Europe and exported to the United States in 1820. But paper dolls have been around much longer than that. As long as there has been paper to make marks upon, dolls have existed.

(Fig. 8) *La Poupee Modele,Rue Drouot 2*, Paris. Double-sided French paper doll. Circa 1870.

Dolls became more widely available through their publication in magazines like the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping.* They were also found in newspapers where characters came printed with their own friends and families and had accompanying stories. The dolls that were included in newspapers became wildly popular during the Depression where children could have an affordable toy to play with despite a shortage of materials. Paper dolls were also incorporated into advertising campaigns by manufacturers of household goods to promote their products like coffee, flour, sewing machines, threads and chocolate to name a few.

 Mass market paper dolls in the early 20th century were modeled after what publishers and designers thought women should be . Beautiful clothing for each doll was as accessible as clipping it straight from the book and expensive-looking accessories popped out from the pages. A girl could fantasize that she was the recipient of these objects. These

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18   "The History of Paper Dolls", http://www.opdag.com/History.html (accessed April 1, 2011).

dolls came with ready-made companions, spouses, children and pets. Playing with paper

dolls showed young girls how to fit into social roles as women.[19] These dolls entertained

girls and were the foundation for imaginative

play that helped many escape familial trials

and tribulations.

(Fig 9) Esther Williams paper doll. Reproduction from a 1950's era book by *Forget-Me-Not Publishing*

One of girl influenced by her paper

dolls is MGM movie star, Esther Williams.

Williams' family was one of the many

families struggled during the Depression.

Her father worked odd jobs and built her a

doll house for Christmas out of scraps of

wood that he had collected during the year.

Out of four other siblings, it was the one

thing that was not a hand-me-down that she could call her own. She proceeded to cut figures

from magazines that her mother would bring home from work. Esther created families of

"mothers," "fathers," "sisters" and "brothers." Williams designed clothing for them, making

sure to cut out tabs so that they would fit the dolls. She created stories and lives for her

creations from her imagination and created her own secret world away from the struggles of

her family during the depression. In a book edited by Steven A. Cohen, *Games We Played:*

A Celebration of Childhood and Imagination, Esther discusses her thoughts on dolls and

escapism "Little girls all over the world make up stories, make up families, compensate for

the ones they don't have, make changes to the ones they do have – create scenarios in which

events take imaginary turns and perhaps make life better than it is."

19   Wagner-Ott, Anna. "Analysis of Gender Identity Through Doll and Action Figure Politics in Art Education." *Studies in Art Education* 43, no. 3 (April 1, 2002), 247-250.

(Life came full circle for Esther when she became an MGM star and her own likeness was used in paper doll books.) But while Esther reveled in her childhood fantasies of a better life with her paper dolls, she eventually became the exact thing she fantasized about as a child. She became a model of beauty that was used to perpetuate the image of perfection for young girls.

I believe that creating images of women of varying races and sizes and displaying them together as paper dolls is a way to encourage women to look past what the media feeds us. Paper dolls used in this way are a creative way to promote body acceptance. Many women played with paper dolls as children so they are recognizable images to women, this draws them closer. These paper dolls break free from their own standards. They do not come with the notion that they need to conform to a social standard of beauty, they do not come with a pre-made family and forced into a role that society and the media perpetuate. They are individuals. A voluptuous female form in one, an athletic shape in another. Each rebelling, and moving away from the media ideals of beauty, away from the constrictive clothing we are told to cover our bodies with. In each example, beauty is portrayed in a realistic and lighthearted manner with gouache, ink and paper. Gouache lends itself to layering and playful use of color. The paper dolls themselves are not giving the viewer a lecture on how to accept their bodies, these dolls

(Fig. 10) Jennifer Hayes, *Unassembled Pear-Shaped Doll,* 2011. Ink on paper, 12 x 4 in

16

already have. Therefore, the viewer can learn by example. The dolls are content, happy with how they look. So much so, that they are presented to the viewer in clothing they normally would not wear in public. They are allowing you into their private space, meeting the viewer's gaze and turning it back on them.

Paper dolls are not an innovative new method of creating art. They have been around for centuries. I believe, however, that by making each doll an individual with a personality of her own, who has her own presence, I can connect with the viewer beyond what just a beautiful painting of a woman can do. They are flat representations of women, hinged and smiling. But the flat doll is more than just a vehicle for paint and playfulness; it is a vehicle of change.

Chapter 5
Using Social Media to Usurp Corporate Media

Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter have become a tool to transmit messages to large groups of people united in a common belief. Blogging has become an outlet that stretches worldwide across racial, social and language boundaries. The easy accessibility of sites like Blogger, Wordpress and Typepad give people a platform to share information and learn[20]. Even in countries where mass media is controlled by the government, blogs have found a freedom from media censorship and give people a voice. Social media sites are important outlets for moving information by linking their pages to other blogs and websites. This method of information sharing is ideal to movements who need to get a message across to a large audience because they are not hindered by media bias and corporate regulation. While this method of sharing is one of the most ideal, the downside is that some of the information included in amateur blogs is not fact-checked for accuracy.[21]

Projects that encourage discussion and acceptance like The Adipositivity Project are using social media sites to spread their message of body acceptance to a broader audience. The Adipositivity Project aims to promote size acceptance through photographs of fat women in their own environment. It's creator, Substantia Jones, uses sites like Facebook, Twitter and Tumbler to promote the project by posting images that link back to her website.

Technorati.com, the leading search engine for blogs, conducted a "State of the Blogoshpere" study to find growth and trends in the blogosphere.[22] This study found that bloggers use of social media tools is expanding. Links can be shared easily and the tools to

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20   Sylvia Engdahl, *Current Controversies: Blogs*. [Detroit: Greenhaven Press/Gale, 2008], 20.

21   Ibid., 25.

22   Blogosphere implies that blogs are connected as an online community where everyday authors can publish their opinions and stories as a social network.

create blogs are easier to use.[23] While a majority of blogs are merely vanity blogs that are focused on the blog owners personal life and have a limited number of readers. There are blogs that focus their posts on more specific topics from politics to specialized hobbies, which have a large audience. This study found that 48% of bloggers believe that in the next five years, more people will be getting their news and entertainment from blogs rather than from traditional media, and 40% of consumers say that they agree with bloggers' views and their opinion about mainstream media is waning.

I incorporated the social media aspect in my thesis because of how quickly I could gather information. It has expanded my project by allowing me to meet and interact with people who I would have never had the chance to encounter. And it's these people that have helped usher me into my passion about the perception of women's bodies in the media. Reading accounts of how people have overcome personal perceptions about their bodies helped me focus the direction of my work.

Women have endured enough critical treatment during our time as humans on the Earth. The media has spearheaded a movement of beauty that no woman can possibly comply with. While we are overwhelmed with products that will hide our flaws, creams that will make us more beautiful and desirable, we are pointing fingers at each other proclaiming "Real women have curves!" and "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels" are detrimental to our self esteem and our daughters' self esteem.

My paper dolls are just a 2D recreation of a woman's body. Every woman is real, every woman has curves, and every woman deserves the right to feel good about her body. The message they represent is if you are walking, breathing, laughing and living, you are a real woman, and you can break away from the standards of beauty continually pushed upon

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23   "State of the Blogosphere 2010" http://technorati.com/blogging/article/state-of-the-blogosphere-2010-introduction (accessed April 1, 2011).

you, and be true to yourself. They are beautiful, and lighthearted. They laugh at themselves and welcome each other into the discussion. Shouldn't you should join in too?

List of Thesis Works

Figure A. *Hourglass Shaped Doll*. Gouache and ink. 14" x 42" inches. 2011

Figure B. *Inverted Triangle Shaped Doll*. Gouache and ink. 14" x 42" inches. 2011

Figure C. *Pear Shaped Doll*. Gouache and ink. 12" x 41" inches. 2011

Figure D. *Oval Shaped Doll*. Gouache and ink. 12" x 36" inches. 2011

Figure E. *Rectangle Shaped Doll*. Gouache and ink. 14" x 46" inches. 2011

Figure F. *Doll Group 1*. Gouache and ink. 14" x 46" inches each. 2011

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Appendix 1: Artist Statement

My illustrations are often lighthearted and filled with a sense of play. I want to create a sense of fun energy that draws the viewer into my work. The world is full of suffering, I think there is no need to illustrate it. Within the last few years, I discovered the art of paper doll making and I believe that this format embodies the sense of lightheartedness that I want to convey.

Though I'm relatively new to gouache, it conveys a softness and approachability that I feel most mediums do not. I can layer color over color and blend the paint with a muted palette to convey subtle emotion. I wanted the hand of the artist to continue to be a part of the aesthetics of my work by leaving sketch marks, paint flaws and irregular lines.

Appendix 2: Thesis Proposal (December 2010)

My thesis will be a series of 6, 42 inch constructed paper dolls depicting the standard female body shapes of triangle, inverted triangle, rectangle, diamond, hourglass and oval. Through the construction of the paper dolls assembled over found art in the form of vintage women's underwear ads, I will explore standards of beauty and body image in a lighthearted manner.

The 6 body shapes that I will be depicting are some of the shapes that the fashion industry use to standardize the way that women look in their clothes. These body shapes are what they use to define women's bodies.

Magazines focus on the size and shape of the celebrity du jour. Celebrities like Jessica Simpson gain 20 pounds, and there's a media outcry. She's out of control. Magazine covers are filled with images of her in unflattering poses, or catching her eating. If a female celebrity gains 20 pounds, and is a horrendous beast, what does that make the rest of us that don't fit the media's ideal?

Up until the early part of the 20th century, the image of beauty for women in western societies was a voluptuous, "reproductive" form. Women with full hips, thighs and breasts were painted lovingly by artists. Full bodies were popular because they epitomized fertility, which made them more appealing than lean, masculine-like bodies.

The idolization of female thinness is a recent ideal. It is argued that the thin concept in body image began as a marketing ploy by the fashion industry in the 1920's. They set the standard for cultural beauty in most Western societies. Up until the 1920's clothing and fashion were represented by hand-drawn illustrations that were beautifully painted. Shortly after that, photographs replaced the illustrations and were widely distributed through mass-market magazines. These magazines presented a fantasy image of how women were supposed to look in fashionable clothing which required them to mould their bodies because each look suited a particular body shape. Then women began binding their chests and using foundation

garments to achieve these desired body shapes.

The trend of slimness continued through the 40's and 50's, with minor adjustments, movie stars became more shapely, but remained thin throughout the 60's until the thin boyish figure of Twiggy became the role model for a new generation of women.

Fast forward to the present era where magazines and designers choose to use extremely thin models to advertise clothing. This influences women to change the size and shape of their bodies to conform to current trends and culturally-defined body shapes.

Vintage advertisements are a good example of how the media and fashion industries say women should look. By wearing girdles and bras to mould their curves and hide their bulges, women could achieve an image of outer beauty. While the message is still relevant for today, advertisements of yesteryear were less subtle with their message than advertisers of the modern era. Placing these dolls over the vintage ads highlights how vintage media isn't much different than today. They just weren't afraid to say it out loud. Besides, these ads are ludicrous in their messages. "Lose 5 pounds in 5minutes!" How? Wear this girdle. Have unseemly bulges? Slip these underwear on, and they'll flatten your curves so that you look good in clothes.

I want to create a dialog about body image, how it affects women. Looking at a flat image of a woman as represented by the dolls, hanging on a wall is not meant to solve anyone's body issues, it is merely meant to show that women come in many shapes, and within those shapes is beauty. Women feel awkward about their bodies, showing them standing in their underwear represents this awkwardness. But behind this awkwardness is a power and beauty and confidence that is waiting to be shown.

After researching, and collecting imagery for each body type and matching it with an appropriate vintage ad, I will build the boxes that will house the dolls. These boxes will be hand made from wood, without glass. Why put the dolls in boxes? I want to call attention to the notion that women are on "display". Every day we put on clothes to cover or accentuate our bodies, makeup to highlight our faces. Women are looked upon to make a presence, to

be beautiful. Placing the dolls inside a box is a metaphor for the constraints of beauty standards. Also, by not putting them behind glass, I'm making these symbolic references to women more accessible. Yes, we're expected to be boxed in and conform, to follow the rules of the media. To wear clothing that binds and restricts our figures. These dolls break that mold. They step away from society and the media's norms. They remain accessible, looking you right in the eye and they say "this is me, take me as I am".

When the boxes are finished, the rest of the process will focus on painting and cutting out the dolls and assembling them.

Painting the different shaped women in gouache on watercolor paper likens the dolls to those fashion illustrations of the 20's. Women were painted with a realistic simplicity in color and line quality that I plan on reflecting in my own illustrations of the dolls. When the entire process is complete, the dolls will be attached inside the boxes and hung side by side, gallery style and at eye level, so the viewer can make eye contact with them. We've come a long way as a society, from seeing only the extreme ideal of femininity in media. Commercials are starting to feature people who aren't the cultural norm in terms of body shape. Blogs dedicated to body image and acceptance abound, and magazines are starting to stand up and feature women that break away from traditional body sizes. This is not a fat acceptance project, but a project that hopes to celebrate the female figure in different shapes.

Through the process of researching images and constructing the paper dolls, I want to explore my own perceptions of body image and open a dialog with viewers about how media influences the way that women perceive themselves. I want to see why some women base their happiness solely on how they look in their clothes and why they compare themselves to the people that they see in the media. I believe these paper dolls are a rebellion against what the media historically has told us is the ideal form.