Exploration of Social Comparison Theory’s Application for Women Who Engage in
Lifelong Habitual Indoor Tanning

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This thesis titled

Exploration of Social Comparison Theory’s Application for Women Who Engage in
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ABSTRACT

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Appearance management and dress clearly extend beyond the bounds of clothing, to anything that is worn on the body that individuals use to construct the visual self, including tanned skin. A risky appearance management technique because of its required exposure to harmful ultraviolet radiation, tanning can result in life-threatening health conditions such as skin cancer, as well as undesirable appearance outcomes such as skin spots and premature wrinkles. Thus, insight into tanning motives could present catalysts for behavior change as well as identification of barriers to behavior change. The following research questions were explored through five in-depth interviews that resulted in qualitative data:

1. Do women introduce reference comparison individuals or groups in their indoor tanning practices that are reflective of social comparison theory?
2. Do women who engage in habitual indoor tanning practices see/use the outcome (tanned appearance) to develop or combat social anxiety, low self-esteem, and poor body image? If so, how?
3. Does a relationship between life span and habitual indoor tanning practices exist?
4. What, if any, influence do adult women’s lifestyles play in their use of habitual indoor tanning?

5. What barriers exist that prevent behavior change with respect to the use of indoor tanning as a type of appearance management?

Content analysis served as the method of analysis, with six overarching themes emerging: self-esteem, satisfaction with appearance, occupation, desire to curb the aging process, and disregard of health risks. The emergent themes harvested from this study present a strong foundation for understanding motives of women who habitually participate in the activity of indoor tanning. This exploratory research provides insight from women themselves who demonstrated repetitive appearance management regimens that result in positive social comparisons in spite of known long-term risks, both to appearance and health.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Tanning is a widely practiced appearance management behavior in the U.S. According to the Indoor Tanning Association (2005) website, the indoor tanning industry procures five billion dollars yearly in revenue. Globally, approximately 30 million people tan indoors every day (Kwon et al., 2003) with an average of one million Americans using indoor tanning facilities daily (Spencer & Amonette, 1995). Additionally, according to the National Cancer Institute, almost two billion dollars were spent within the U.S. in 2006 on melanoma cancer care—a form of cancer generally associated with exposure to the sun or artificial ultraviolet radiation (UVR; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).

Appearance management, a conscious effort to control one’s outward appearance through choices of dress¹ and behaviors that modify personal appearance, has long been used by women to alter their natural appearances in efforts to more closely reflect standards of ideal beauty (Reilly & Rudd, 2007; Rudd & Lennon; 2001). Social norms for dress typically define beauty ideals that are interpreted and adopted by individuals and then recognized in societies as fashion (Sproles, 1981). A historic transition from natural beauty to enhanced beauty, as well as from valuing fair versus tanned complexions has occurred in Western society over the past century (Watson & Martin, 2000), resulting in fashion status for tanned skin tones. For example, in the early days of the Miss America pageant, women were praised for their natural beauty, but today, physical and cosmetic enhancements are necessary to succeed (Watson & Martin, 2000).

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¹ Dress, defined by Roach and Eicher (1992), includes worn apparel and accessories such as clothing, shoes, and jewelry as well as the body itself and body modifications such as hairstyles, tattoos, piercings and tanned skin.
Because the Miss America Pageant is an internationally recognized contest reflecting the appearance standards that many American women strive to emulate, its demonstrated transition in beauty ideals lends insight into women’s behaviors with respect to appearance management. Centuries ago, maintaining a pale complexion was a sign of high status and wealth; however, throughout the 20th century the focus has changed. Since the late 1930’s, a tanned appearance has become popular. Today tanning is widely available and has even been incorporated into popular television with shows such as “Sunset Tan,” which glamorizes the practice of indoor tanning and debunks the idea that tanning is unsafe and unhealthy. Unfortunately however, tanning is a risky appearance management technique because it is impossible for the tanner to avoid exposure to harmful UVR (Levine, Sorace, Spencer, & Siegel, 2005).

Generally, women desire improvements in their personal appearances in response and reference to unrealistic beauty standards portrayed in the media (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004) and in their social environments (Reilly & Rudd, 2008). Feelings of self-worth typically increase for individuals who perceive themselves as accepted members of social groups, which can be facilitated through managing appearance to reflect the groups’ accepted beauty ideals. The shared sense of beauty in a given culture provides a guideline and a foundation by which women manage their appearances through dress and also engage in meaningful communication with one another through their appearances. Lois W. Banner exemplified this notion reflecting, “the pursuit of beauty and of its attendant features, fashion and dress, has more than any other factor bound together women of different classes, regions, and ethnic groups and constituted a key element in
women’s separate experience of life” (Watson & Martin, 2000, p. 105). Key to appearance management in this context is its implementation, which is often monitored through comparisons of one’s own appearance with respect to others in social groups. Festinger (1954) developed the social comparison theory to explore and explain the phenomena of self-assessment in a comparative manner, rather than exclusively in terms of objectively measured individual achievement. Since its original development, social comparison has emerged as a credible motivator for dress behaviors (Reilly & Rudd, 2007; Rudd & Lennon, 2001).

Generally, members of society achieve (real or perceived) greater acceptance within groups the closer they are to the members’ ideal beauty standards. Current beauty standards for women in the United States, and most western cultures, emphasize youth, thinness, and tanned complexions. The aging process presents challenges for women to maintain appearances that closely match society’s ideal beauty. In fact, Adams and Huston (1975) noted that, for women, aging is the ultimate loss of beauty because “there is a single standard of beauty, that is, a youthful appearance” (p. 657). As women age, their appearance management behaviors tend to accelerate in response to the physical changes they undergo, such as thickening waistline, effects of gravity, inelasticity of skin, wrinkles, and age spots. The relationship between self-image and appearance has been documented by Fawkner and McMurray (2002), Johnson, Francis, and Burns (2007), Lennon and Rudd (1994), Reilly and Rudd (2007), Rudd (1996), and Rudd and Lennon (2000, 2001) with appearance management behaviors employed as means to enhance feelings of self-worth.
This study sought to discover motives for tanning as an appearance management technique, and specifically, to gain insight into the influences of social groups and social interactions on individual women’s behaviors with respect to habitual indoor tanning. Because achieving ongoing, year round, darkening of skin color requires substantive investment of both time and money, and because the most widely adopted method of achieving this outcome (i.e., tanning) creates a health risk, identification of the motives that influence women to engage in indoor tanning were sought. An exploration of the underlying reasons that women allocate resources for indoor tanning is needed to clearly understand why risky choices are made. The purpose of this study was to investigate motives for the use of habitual indoor tanning by women. Ultimately, discovery of women’s reasons to engage in indoor tanning can reveal whether their behaviors are in response to social stimuli and result from comparison of self with reference groups and societal ideals or whether personal, self fulfilling needs are stronger motives. Thus, this study sought to determine whether social comparison theory helps explain habitual indoor tanning behavior. Additionally, identification of catalysts and barriers to adoption of alternative choices for women who currently engage in habitual indoor tanning were assessed, particularly because tanning behavior is associated with documented health risks.

Definition of Terms

*Appearance management* is the sum total of one’s appearance presented to others, and the myriad of ways people control they way that they look. Appearance management involves the outcome as well as the way people make decisions regarding their self
presentation. Decisions are made about the types of garments and accessories worn, their color, fit, and style, and the ways garments, accessories and other adornments are assembled into a complete look. Appearance management also consists of behaviors to help determine body shape and muscle tone, use of cosmetics and salon services, and invasive body alterations such as liposuction or implantation (Reilly & Rudd, 2007).

Appearance motivation is the conscious choice individuals make to change their appearance because of realized pressure from social and emotional influences.

Body image is how an individual views his or her body and the personal level of acceptance of those views (Cattarin & Thompson, 1994).

Body modification results from alteration of one’s body through invasive and noninvasive procedures that permanently change the appearance of one’s body (Myers, 1992).

Dress is considered to be anything that is worn on the body and any modification made to the body (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

Habitual tanner, in this study, is defined as a person who participates in indoor tanning an average of three times per 7-day week.

Impression management is the process by which individuals create appearances so they are viewed in a desired way by others. In order to properly management one’s appearance he or she must engage in appearance management techniques or behaviors (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Lifelong tanner refers, in this study, to a person who has participated in tanning (both indoor and outdoor) for at least 15 years.
Self-esteem is the process of making an appraisal of one’s self concept (Wells & Marwell, 1977).

Self-monitoring is the process of intentionally and tediously watching one’s behavior and adapting said behavior based on emergent social situations (Snyder, 1974, 1979).

Social anxiety refers to having significant fear of public scrutiny while involved in social situations (Liebowitz, Gorman, Fryer, & Klein, 1985).

Social comparison is the concept of making a judgment of oneself based on an existential factor such as a comparative group (Festinger, 1954; Wood, 1989).

Ultraviolet radiation (UVR) is an emission from sunlight or a synthetically produced sunlamp that has electromagnetic waves that are stronger than the human eye can identify and extended exposure to UVR causes serious illness (World Health Organization, 2003).
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Appearance management and dress clearly extend beyond the bounds of clothing, to anything that is worn on the body that individuals use to construct the visual self (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Thus, tanned skin, whether achieved by deliberate exposure to natural sunlight, use of a tanning bed, or through application of spray-on color or pigment altering lotion, is the result of appearance management and is considered to be an element of dress.

This literature review investigates the concept of dress and behaviors, including self-monitoring related to appearance management, body modification, and body image specifically as they apply to tanned skin and tanning behaviors. In addition, an investigation of the role of skin as a communicator, currently and historically, is presented. Because appearance management techniques and social comparison groups develop and change over time, a life-span approach was employed.

Dress

The term *dress* refers to the presentation of the body. Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) defined dress to include direct modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath in addition to clothing, shoes, accessories and jewelry that are worn on the body. Thus, tanning behaviors resulting in “colored skin” are included in the process of dressing one’s body.

A plethora of psychological and social influences causing individuals to dress in particular ways have been previously identified. These include personality (Johnson et
al., 2007), body image (Reilly & Rudd, 2008), social anxiety (Reilly & Rudd, 2007), and age and sexual orientation (Fawkner & McMurray, 2002).

Life Span

Appearance management techniques change with age (Adams and Huston, 1975). Kaiser (1990) noted that physical attractiveness is a lifelong process beginning at infancy and spanning through late adulthood. Kaiser (1990) observed that babies are cared for more or less based on their physical attractiveness; school children are judged by both peers and teachers based on how they look; and, children respond more favorably to more attractive adults. As children grow into adolescence, the importance of appearance is even greater, with the emphasis greater for women than men.

In adulthood, emphasis on appearance is as restricting as it was during childhood. Young adult women strive to maintain a particular appearance, both in their bodies as well as their faces (McLean, 1978). As women age, a difficult paradigm presents itself. In adulthood, social emphasis on appearance continues to be restricting. American societal ideals focus on youthful appearances as perceived physical attractiveness (Kaiser, 1990). However, as women age they become less focused on their appearance and more focused on physical health and ability to participate in routine activities (Cash, Winstead, & Janda, 1986). Aging women, especially those who were viewed as attractive in their younger years, struggle with aging because they often compare themselves with previous versions of what they looked like (Berscheid & Walster, 1974).
Social Comparison Theory

Festinger’s (1954) theory of social comparison presents the concept that people look to referent groups and individuals to assess their own abilities and opinions. Individuals tend to compare themselves to people with whom they interact in social situations. Festinger (1954) focused on assessment of skills and abilities in his initial work, suggesting that beginning chess players would not compare their abilities to those of exceptional accomplishment and talent. Social comparison is particularly ambiguous when comparative traits are subjective rather than objective, thus applications of this theory have been hypothesized and tested for a variety of behaviors including level of aspiration, opinion (Hochbaum, 1953), and comparison of ability (Whittemore, 1925). Festinger’s general observation regarding the way people use social reference groups to assess their own achievement levels was that uniformity of opinions leads to social order. According to Festinger (1954), when people determine that their abilities or skills do not match prevailing social norms, their behaviors change to be more similar to the group, or the performance of most others. Similarly, when people determine that their abilities match or exceed prevailing norms, feelings of self-satisfaction typically result. The pressure to achieve uniformity was observed by Festinger (1954) as he tested the hypothesis in a variety of contexts. Aspiration to achieve group status was addressed along with the concept of competition, and, although group compliance was desired in terms of general behavior, the ability to be slightly better (smarter, more athletically or artistically skilled) than other group members was desired.
Wood (1989) provided insight into how theories based on social comparison have developed from Festinger’s (1954) original. She noted that Festinger’s (1954) original theory lacks universal application in modern society. Because the social environment plays a key role in the way in which comparisons are made, contemporary social environments, and their related issues, must be addressed in current research. Wood (1989) noted that when social comparisons are made, the comparers seek equality among all parties involved in active social situations; comparers may also focus on desired qualities which they have not yet acquired.

Self-monitoring is an aspect of social comparison. Linked to self-esteem and social anxiety, self-monitoring is the practice of intentionally and tediously watching one’s behavior and adapting said behavior based on different situations (Snyder, 1974, 1979). Self-monitoring can become a process by which one attempts to control every aspect of his or her physical appearance. This can extend beyond simple daily beauty modifications, such as wearing make-up and styling hair, to potentially dangerous and health-threatening behaviors such as watching, documenting, and severely reducing calorie intake. Self-monitoring can be a daily activity or a circumstantial activity (Snyder, 1974, 1979). For instance, while one person may self-monitor all day every day, another may self-monitor in anticipation of certain events for the purpose of addressing social anxiety associated with the events.

_Lennon/Rudd Model of Body Aesthetics_

Lennon and Rudd developed model of body aesthetics (Lennon & Rudd, 1994). They found, through social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) that women build
particular appearance styles (i.e., a “personal body aesthetic”) for themselves. Through appearance management techniques, women gain personal satisfaction in creation their appearance outcomes. The process of creating a body aesthetic and identifying with it aids in the development of self-esteem, particularly when women gain positive reinforcement from others in response to their appearances.

Reilly and Rudd (2007) implemented both the Lennon/Rudd (1994) model of body aesthetics as well as Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory in a comparison of appearance management practices and social anxiety among both homosexual and straight men. The authors noted that angst in social situations pushes individuals to practice appearance management techniques even despite health consequences.

As previously discussed, scholars have explored the relationships between body image, social anxiety, and self-monitoring, with the “self.” That is, the important role of each of these concepts in terms of psychological factors has been documented. Additionally, the theoretical base for this research acknowledges the role of “others” in formation of body image, development of social anxiety, and establishment of self-monitoring behaviors. Taylor and Lobel (1989) explored Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory and found that people desire to make social comparisons based upon tangible similarities and differences rather than ambiguous subjective information. However, without the presences of tangible information, people revert to subjective and often indefinite cues.
Appearance Management Motives

Reilly and Rudd (2007) defined appearance management as

The sum total of our appearance presented to others, and the myriad of ways we control it or make decisions regarding that presentation. We make decisions about the types of garments and accessories we wear, their color, fit, and style, and the ways we assemble them into a complete “look.” Appearance management also consists of behaviors to help determine body shape and muscle tone, use of cosmetics and salon services, and invasive body alterations such as liposuction or implantation. (p. 156)

Today, salon tanning or “fake” tanning has become an increasingly popular form of body modification and appearance management; it is a way to dress one’s body by changing the appearance of the skin.

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety references a plethora of fears that focus on public scrutiny in social situations (Liebowitz, et al., 1985; Reilly & Rudd, 2007). Due to social anxiety that causes individuals to engage in appearance management techniques such as tanning, appearance motivation emerges as a responsive behavior. Appearance motivation and appearance management both result in individual drives to avoid social anxiety through the constraint of controlling one’s appearance (Cash, 1990; DeSantis & Kayson, 1997; Nell & Ashton, 1996).
Self-Esteem

Social anxiety is directly linked to self-esteem. Self-esteem is the process of making an appraisal of one’s self concept (Wells & Marwell, 1977). The process of evaluating one’s self concept can focus on both physical and psychological aspects. Due to issues with self-esteem, women may practice a number of appearance management techniques to keep their beauty and egos intact (Fallon, 1990). Lennon and Rudd (1994) found that appearance management techniques positively correlate with self-esteem.

Body Image

Another factor that relates to social anxiety and self-esteem is body image. Reilly and Rudd (2008) defined body image as how people view their own bodies and their related levels of acceptance of their views. Each individual develops a unique image of his or her body and those images typically affect appearance management practices.

Individuals often find themselves more attractive when they alter their appearances by tanning the skin with artificial UVR (Broadstock, Borland, & Gason, 1992; Hill, Theobald, Borland, White, & Marks, 1990; Miller Ashton, McHoskey, & Gimbel, 1990). Younger generations such as X, Y, and the Millennials perceive tanned skin to be not only attractive, but also reflective of good health (Broadstock et al., 1992; Hillhouse, Turrisi, & Kastner, 2000; Leary & Jones, 1993; Miller et al., 1990; Wichstrom, 1994). Furthermore, some individuals who participate in salon tanning continue to do so when made aware of the health risks (Beasley & Kittle, 1997). In support of this seemingly irrational behavior, additional research has shown that simply informing and educating individuals about tanning risks rarely leads to an immediate or
permanent change in behavior (Biener & Abrams, 1992; Blais & Rossi, 1991; Hillhouse et al., 2000).

### Aging

Historically, aging adults have been seen as more wise, worldly, and more respected than younger members of societies. Throughout history, patterns of respect for the elderly have been observed, such as in Native American society, Asian cultures, and even in colonial America where older adults’ wisdom and opinions were sought by younger generations (Ringel, 1998). Today, aging has taken on a much more volatile image. With initiation and adoption of routine plastic surgery, aging is actively resisted by those who use financial and time resources to engage in invasive and/or time consuming beauty rituals. The ageist movement has prompted research resulting in empirical evidence that cosmetic surgery or cosmetic enhancement can be a combatant for low self-esteem (Ringel, 1998).

### Appearance Management Techniques

#### Impression Management

First impressions are typically formed based on appearances. Leary and Kowalski (1990) defined the term impression management as the process by which individuals create appearances so they are viewed in a desired way by others. One must engage in appearance management techniques or behaviors to properly manage his or her appearance. Leary and Kowalski (1990) explored impression construction, the process of engaging in certain techniques or behaviors to construct a desired appearance for the purpose of making a desired impression. Individuals use appearance management
techniques to build particular impressions as they relate to social situations (Leary &

*Risky Versus Routine Appearance Management Techniques*

Lennon and Rudd (1994) defined two separate categories of appearance
management: routine and risky. The routine category reflects the basic task of taking care
of oneself through routine daily activities. Styling one’s hair exemplifies a routine daily
activity. The risky category includes more severe and invasive forms of managing one’s
physical appearance such as plastic surgery. Tanning, measure of its inherent health risks
due to skin damage, falls into the risky category.

*Body Modification*

Body modification is a form of appearance management involving physical
alteration of the body including “cosmetics, coiffure, ornamentation, adornment,
tattooing, scarification, piercing, cutting, branding, and other procedures, done mostly for
aesthetic reasons” (Myers, 1992, p. 267). Myers (1992) divided body modification into
two categories: long-term versus short-term modification.

*Skin*

Individuals’ skin can communicate both voluntary and involuntary messages.
These messages are displayed visually through the appearance of the skin and are
interpreted by observers (Koblenzer, 1998). Involuntary messages relay uncontrollable
information such as blushing due to embarrassment, reddening due to allergic reaction, or
skin color related to ethnicity. In contrast, a voluntary message conveyed by the skin is an
elective procedure or technique that results from a deliberately manipulated outward
appearance. This may be wearing make-up, displaying tattoos, or changing the color of one’s skin with tanning (Koblenzer, 1998).

For many cultures in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, having pale skin was a status symbol because pale skin and fair complexions meant that individuals were wealthy enough to have servants and laborers to complete work (Koblenzer, 1998). Furthermore, in these historic times pale skin was a sign or indicator of one’s natural beauty, status, and pedigree; a tanned appearance demonstrated that one would be working outside as a commoner or serf (Segrave, 2005). Due to these social values, women at that time endeavored to ensure that they were not exposed to the sun by using clothing and accessories to cover themselves (Albert & Ostheimer, 2002). Following the Second World War, the lifestyle of the average American began to change. People were no longer secluded in their homes as traveling around the country became simpler and a sign of status. As a result, travel to warmer locations became desirable and developing a suntan became a sign of leisure and wealth (Koblenzer, 1998).

A recent national, comprehensive study exploring population density and number of available tanning salons reported that the following cities have the highest frequency of tanning salons: Pittsburgh, PA; Charleston, WV; Akron, OH; and, Scottsdale, AZ (Hoerster et al., 2008). Notably, the Appalachian region hosts two of the four cities (Pittsburgh and Charleston) that have the highest density of tanning salons per capita in the United States. Furthermore, Akron falls just outside of the Appalachian region. It is important to note, however, that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010)
reported that the Hispanic population has the second highest incidence of skin cancer and African Americans have the third highest incidence.

Effects of Ultraviolet Radiation

UVR is a proven human carcinogen (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). Frequent tanners using new high pressure sunlamps receive 12 to 15 times the annual UVA dose compared to the dose they receive from natural sunlight exposure (American Cancer Society, 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). According to the World Health Organization (2003), a 15- to 30-minute session in a tanning bed is equivalent to an entire day at the beach, and using a tanning bed before the age of 30 increases the risk of developing melanoma by 75%.

The link between the exposure of UVR and the development of skin cancers is clear, because overexposure to UVR is recognized to be the primary risk factor for most skin cancers (American Cancer Society, 2009). Skin cancer has become pandemic in the U.S., with approximately 20 percent of Americans expected to develop skin cancer in their lifetimes (Robinson, 2005). According to the American Cancer Society (2009), 62,480 new cases of melanoma skin cancer were reported in 2008 of which 8,420 resulted in death. There are several different types of skin cancer, but the most common are melanomas, basal and squamous cell carcinoma, and keratoacanthomas (American Cancer Society, 2009). Diagnosis of cutaneous melanoma, which is the most serious form of skin cancer, has increased in frequency more rapidly than all other skin cancers combined (Hillhouse et al., 2000).
In addition to the linkage of UVR exposure and skin cancer, the length of time individuals have been exposed affects the likelihood of acquiring skin cancer (Lea et al., 2007). Lea et al. (2007) investigated cumulative versus intermittent exposure to UVB rays, and concluded that both long-term and short-term exposure to UVB rays can lead to melanoma (Godar, Urback, Gasporro, & Van der Leun, 2003).

Research Questions

Based on the aforementioned literature, a strong rationale exists to implement Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory to explore practices of habitual indoor tanning among a select group of women. Given the health risks associated with a popular and growing trend to manage appearances through indoor tanning, identifying motives to engaging in this behavior, and exploring catalysts and barriers to changing the behavior has potential to yield health benefits for current and future generations of women.

Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. Do women introduce reference comparison individuals or groups in their indoor tanning practices that are reflective of social comparison theory?
2. Do women who engage in habitual indoor tanning practices see/use the outcome (tanned appearance) to develop or combat social anxiety, low self-esteem, and poor body image? If so, how?
3. Does a relationship between life span and habitual indoor tanning practices exist?
4. What, if any, influence do adult women’s lifestyles play in their use of habitual indoor tanning?
5. What barriers exist that prevent behavior change with respect to the use of indoor tanning as a type of appearance management?
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To appropriately address the exploratory nature of this study, a set of five interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. The interview questions were designed so that comparative case analyses could be generated. Berg (2007) emphasized the use of case studies as a qualitative research method as a guide to exploratory research. Through case studies, he encouraged concentration on a single phenomenon, such as habitual use of indoor tanning, to uncover the evident interaction of significant factors characteristic of this phenomenon. As Berg (2007) suggested, the collection of comparative case profiles improves investigators’ ability to theorize about a broader context than single cases could offer. Thus, women’s habitual indoor tanning practices were analyzed in the context of social comparison behaviors to determine whether the theory was relevant among members of this purposive convenience sample.

Using qualitative analysis as the method of this research project allowed for rich, descriptive results that could not have been realized using another type of analysis. Creating a positive atmosphere in which rapport was built between the investigator and the participants was important to setting a positive tone for data collection in each of the five interviews.

Subjects and Recruitment

Five subjects were desired so that collective comparative case profiles could be presented and analyzed. Single interviews were conducted with each subject; resulting data supported presentation of snapshot case studies. The targeted population for subjects focused on women aged 35 years and older to enable exploration of phenomena
of lifelong and habitual tanning. At this age, women had the capacity to achieve 15 to 20 years of frequent tanning. Using a sample of women residing in the Midwest and Appalachian region enabled a collective voice from a geographic area where there is a high density of indoor tanning in relation to the population. In addition, the climate of this region makes year-round outdoor tanning impossible.

In compliance with an approved Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol, initial participants were recruited via personal recommendations and word-of-mouth. The researcher visited tanning salons and, during interaction with employees, inquired about the prospect of recruiting individuals with potential interest in participating in interviews about their activities related to using indoor tanning facilities. During the recruiting process, it was emphasized that the protocol required each participant to be a female who had spent at least the past 15 years tanning approximately three times per 7-day week.

Interview Protocol

Each of the participants was interviewed individually using a qualitative, semi-structured protocol. The interviews were audio recorded, then transcribed for analysis. Each participant read and signed a formal confidentiality agreement that stated the contents of the interview, both written and recorded, would be secure and viewed solely by the primary researcher and her academic advisor. Each participant was given a copy of the confidentiality agreement for her records. Participants’ profiles remained anonymous through the use of pseudonyms.

At the beginning of the interview, each participant supplied basic demographic information including location of residence, ethnicity, yearly income, percentage of
yearly income spent on appearance management, percentage of yearly income spent on indoor tanning, marital status, and number children or dependents.

The following questions served as the framework for the interview protocol:

Question 1—First, I would like you to walk me through a typical day of beauty regimens; what do you do in the morning when you first wake up throughout the day, and at night before bed. Please also consider in your response outside stressors or influences that might change of affect your choice of regimens for the day.

Question 2—Tell me about your tanning experiences.

a. At what age did you start tanning?

b. Is there a precipitating event that led you to start tanning?

c. How many times per week do you go tanning?

d. Is there a particular season or time of year when you use indoor tanning more frequently than others?

Question 3—Please describe your motivations for tanning.

a. How do you feel if you miss or skip a “regular” tanning appointment?

b. When you are at the tanning salon, do you find that you are comparing yourself with other patrons or the workers?

c. When you are doing daily activities do you find yourself comparing yourself to other women similar to yourself?

d. Do you find that you are comparing yourself to celebrities in the media- television, Internet, or magazines?

Question 4—Do you have a preferred tanning salon in the area?
a. Why do you prefer these facilities to others?

b. If given the choice do you prefer tanning indoors or outdoors? Why?

Question 5—Can you clearly define the group of people, both family and friends, that you would consider to be closest with?

a. Do any of the individuals you consider to be closest to also tan?

b. Do they tan more or less frequently than you?

c. Is your desire to go tanning influenced by the people you consider to be closest?

d. Has anyone that you consider to be closest ever addressed to you, the frequency with which you tan?

Question 6—Please describe your, self body image?

a. How would others describe your body image and physical appearance?

b. How does your self body image change if you haven’t gone tanning for an extended period of time?

Question 7—Do you use tanning as an appearance management technique, meaning, is tanning part of your “normal” beauty regimen or routine?

a. Do you make clothing decisions, either purchases or outfit choices, based on how tan you are?

b. Do you participate in other activities to enhance your physical appearance such as, working out, dieting, dying hair, etc, please explain.
c. Have you ever undergone any other cosmetic procedures either invasive or dermatological?

d. Describe the relationship between your tanning practices and other appearance enhancing activities you engage in.

Question 8—Are you currently suffering from or have you ever suffered from any form of cancer or other ailment that was a direct result from exposure to ultraviolet radiation? Please describe.

   a. Have you ever sought medical attention from a dermatologist to better understand your risk for cancers related to exposure from ultraviolet radiation?

   b. Do you worry about the possibility of suffering from ailments, such as skin cancer, because they are a risk associated from exposure to ultraviolet radiation?

Question 9—Do you know of any alternatives to indoor tanning (besides outdoor tanning) that are considered safer and render similar results to your appearance?

   a. Have you ever used them? Please explain.

   b. Would you consider partaking in safer alternatives if you were made aware of their availability in your area?

As interviews progressed, probing questions were posed by the researcher in an effort to collect complete data sets that would provide rich content for analysis.
Data Analysis

The purpose of this data collection and analysis method was not to create broad generalizations, but instead to link themes among participants and note individual differences based on key influential factors. Berg (2007) postulated that research is not conducted simply for the collection of data; a qualitative study looks at humanity and the characteristics of that humanity. A qualitative interview process was chosen because approaching a sensitive subject, such as one’s personal appearance, cannot be fully explored in a structured questionnaire, survey, or standardized method. Each individual has a unique perspective and voice that cannot be properly harvested or understood in a structured environment.

The qualitative data evident on resulting transcriptions were coded and analyzed to build collective case studies. In addition to analyses resulting in descriptive profiles of each subject, content analysis was employed to identify overarching themes related to appearance management regimens associated with habitual indoor tanning. Comparison analysis was generated from data that emerged from the collective voices of five subjects. The data analysis addressed, in particular, whether social comparison theory was supportive as a context to understand the phenomenon of habitual tanning. In addition, each of the research questions was explored through content analysis, results of which are described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The participants of this study provided deep insight into their lives and contributed to the development of five individual case studies. Each of the participants’ profiles contributed data that collectively reflected overarching themes related in particular to Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory and motives for indoor tanning behaviors. Table 1 presents an overview of each of the participant’s basic demographic information; a more in-depth view of each is described in the case studies.

Individual Case Profile Analyses

Tina

Tina as a 50-year old began indoor tanning at age 25 and currently tans an average of 4 days per week. Tina’s tanning behaviors are seasonal; she adamantly stated that she does not tan from September to February. Tina works at a family owned company in rural Ohio, with a tanning salon as part of the facility. Tina indicated that in her younger years she would have been upset to miss a regularly scheduled tanning appointment, but she described herself as currently “more go with the flow” and unbothered by alterations in her routine. Although Tina enjoys indoor tanning, her preference for outdoor tanning was reflected in the statement, “I just love the atmosphere, I love the water, I love a pool, I love a beach, I love the sounds, I love the relaxation, I love the magazines, I love the feel of the sun, I just love it all, I’m a sunbather.”

When asked whether she finds herself making comparisons with other women at work, Tina reflected that her customers usually compare themselves to her, but outside of work she does compare herself to other women. Tina made a profound statement during
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Income ($)</th>
<th>% Income spent on Appearance Management</th>
<th>% Income spent on Indoor Tanning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>N/R</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>30,000 – 50,000</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>70,000 – 90,000</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monika</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>30,000 – 50,000</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>N/R</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>30,000 – 50,000</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>N/R</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

her interview when asked about social comparisons, expressing that she believes every woman makes social comparisons. Tina identified a group of family and friends with whom she is close and shared insight about her tanning behavior related to them. She tans more frequently than other members of this group, though they all engage in tanning. Tina reflected that her desire to tan is not influenced by this group of people. When reflecting introspectively about tanning, Tina reported that tanning makes her feel better about her changing, aging body. This concept was illustrated in her statement, “…I’m going through menopause and I’m putting on weight, you look in the mirror, your belly don’t look like your belly, your leg don’t look like your leg and if you are really
white, you don’t, I think I don’t look, cause I…and it’s not vanity and it’s not that I’m doing it for anybody else, but when I look at myself I wanna see me, the one, the me I think I am…so ‘til I get through this little change or whatever, and I have to start exercisin’ a little better, but when I do I tan a little, I don’t think I portray such an ugly body in the mirror….” When talking about body image and how others view her body, Tina was confident that other people think she looks good, and even admire her for maintaining a good appearance. Tina also said that the way she feels about herself changes when she has not gone tanning for an extended period of time. Tina’s tanning practices also influence her clothing decisions. Seasonally, in the winter when she is less tan, she wears more modest outfits and darker colors. In the spring and summer months she reported wearing brighter colors stating, “…certain colors really look good with a nice tan.”

Tina engages in other appearance enhancing activities such as dying her hair and exercising, and those activities change along with her tanned appearance. Tina has never engaged in other long-term or invasive appearance management techniques. She was adamant in stating that she visits a dermatologist every year and has never suffered from any ailment as a result of tanning; however, Tina elaborated that she worries about suffering ill effects from tanning because she has friends who have had skin cancer. Nevertheless, when asked whether she would stop tanning if she were to suffer from a disease such as skin cancer, Tina replied “no.” Tina noted her awareness of safer alternatives to indoor tanning including spray tanning and self-applicable tanning lotions,
but she indicated a belief that she would never totally replace tanning with these alternatives.

*Mary*

Mary, 55, began outdoor tanning in her adolescence, but she did not begin indoor tanning until her late forties. Mary began indoor tanning because she purchased a beauty salon (which she currently owns and currently works as a hair stylist) and it came equipped with a tanning bed. Mary also mentioned that she has a tanning bed in the basement of her home and uses it when she has time, but currently, the bulbs are old. Mary prefers to tan outdoors, particularly at her home where she has a swimming pool. When asked why she prefers outdoor tanning to indoor tanning she stated, “just to get happier.” She reported indifference to her tanned appearance but continued by saying “…it’s nice to have one [a tan] ’cause I look healthy.” Mary tans in preparation for the summer months and indicated that she is not overly concerned if she misses or skips a regular tanning appointment.

Mary compares herself with her coworkers and patrons in her salon and also with celebrities that are in her age range. A mother of five, with two frequent tanning daughters and one occasional tanning son, Mary reflected that her desire for a tanned appearance is not influenced by anyone in her immediate environment. She indicated that she has a positive self body image, but was quick to point out her flaws. “Um, I’m pretty good for 55, except my… I’m a little bit uh, my… I need to exercise more on my belly (laughs). I feel I have to, uh… I’m beginning the aging process, so I use my creams, but I wish I didn’t have the dark circles and a few things like that.” When asked how others
would describe her body and appearance Mary became very nervous and flustered and had difficulty describing how others view her. At first Mary said that her tanned appearance does not influence the clothes she wears, but followed up by stating that she would not wear shorts until she had tan legs. She reported that the colors she wears are not affected by her tanned appearance and continued by stating that she just likes “summery colors.”

Mary participates in other appearance enhancing activities such as dieting and dying her hair, but expressed that they are not influenced by her desire to tan, but rather to enhance her health. She described short-term appearance management changes in response to her darker skin, such as eliminating foundation make-up. Mary elaborated that foundation is necessary in the winter because her paler skin during that season accentuates the dark circles under her eyes.

Mary has never engaged in long-term or invasive appearance management techniques and has also never consulted with a dermatologist. Mary does not worry about suffering from ailments as a result of indoor tanning, but she confided concern for over exposure to natural sunlight. Mary alluded to a connection between exposure to UV rays and health risk when she stated that if she felt any of her children were tanning too frequently, she would definitely step in and say something. Interestingly, Mary rationalized her children’s reasons for tanning, but expressed awareness of risks and concern for their well being. “So, if I thought they did it way too much or all winter long then I would say something, but I don’t feel like, I feel like they do it for a purpose, not so much to keep it looking dark.”
Mary is aware of alternatives to indoor tanning, such as a self-tanner she sells in her salon. She has given this product as a gift to her children, but has never used it herself. When asked if she would participate in safer alternatives and give up indoor tanning altogether Mary replied, “maybe.”

Monika

Monika, a 41-year-old hair stylist, began indoor tanning in her early twenties. She began indoor tanning because it was a faster alternative to outdoor tanning and she also finds it more convenient and relaxing, Monika prefers to tan indoors because she does not have the time lie out in the sun. She shared that 20 minutes in the tanning bed is equal to 8 hours in the natural sun. Currently, Monika is tans indoors two or three times per week. Monika is employed at a beauty salon that has indoor tanning services. She tans more frequently in the winter months, but cuts back in the summer because she is outdoors more often. She mentioned that she cuts back to “once or twice a week in the summer” just to keep up her tan, but in the winter she tans as much as 3 or 4 days per week.

Monika indicated that she is not bothered if she misses a regular tanning appointment, and said that if she misses it is because she is bored with the tanning process; however, once she begins to fade, and she starts tanning again, it is “nice to see a nice glow coming back.” Although, Monika said that she tries not to compare herself with her patrons or coworkers and tries to avoid a tan that looks “too fake,” she reported that she does compare herself to women outside of work who are similar to her age, height, and weight. She indicated that she does not compare herself to celebrities because she wants to stay “realistic.” She elaborated that there is a point during a tan that you can
look too dark or too rubbery, but confided that she does not want to look too pale or pasty. Monika believes that working in a salon influences her to keep up her tanned appearance, noting “Oh yes one hundred percent, it sure does, ’cause if you look good doing hair then it keeps my clientele build up, keeps me lookin’ young, makes me feel younger to keep up with my appearance, I’d feel funny if I didn’t (laughs).”

Monika identified a group of people with whom she is closest, with and mentioned in particular her three daughters. Her two older daughters, ages 19 and 20, both avidly tan, but the youngest daughter, whose age was not disclosed, does not yet tan, because Monika is not allowing her to do so. When asked whether she thinks she influenced her daughters to tan, Monika was very positive her in response. “Yes, um I do tell them the good parts about it, but I did educate them on the bad parts about it, not to tan too much and not too long in the tanning bed at first. Just enough to get that glow going and then they need to stop. That way their skin doesn’t get too old too quickly and get too rubbery ’cause of course tanning beds can do that, even the outside sun can do that as well.”

Monika recognized that tanning is a big part of her culture. She noted that some of her friends and coworkers tan more and some less than she, explaining that her desire to be tan is influenced by her work and personal culture. Additionally, she said that her parents have addressed a concern for the frequency with which she tans, because a female relative has suffered from cancer as a result of tanning.

When asked about her body image, Monika expressed that she looks good for her age, and reflected that positive self-esteem and maintenance of her appearance keeps her
looking good. She also noted that people who do not know her do not believe that she is 41 and has two grown children. Monika said that when she cuts back on tanning it is “really hard.” She recently cut back on tanning because she was getting spots and she wanted to make sure they went away before she started tanning again. Monika indicated that tanning is part of her daily beauty regimen, just as she styles her hair and applies make-up; tanning is omnipresent in her life. Additionally, work is a dominant component of Monika’s life and her appearance management, such as choice of clothing, is responsive to seasonal changes and limitations as employment requires. Monika also participates in other appearance enhancing activities such as dying her hair and exercising. She indicated increasing exercise decreases her need to tan. “Well you know, um, when I do work out I feel like I don’t need to tan as much because I feel like my body is getting into shape and I’m lookin’ a little better, um I start to get that lazy streak you need to make yourself feel better so you go to tanning.” Monika noted the connection between tanning and youth, indicating that because younger generations also participate in tanning, it makes her feel younger to do so as well. Monika has never undergone long-term or invasive appearance management techniques, but said she might in the future. “It’s always a good thing, you always think about it the crows feet, I mean around your eyes and stuff and the crows around your mouth and when you get the age spots you’d like to try to have those fixed… so we’ll see how much worse they get in the years to come, they might look okay.”

Monika has not suffered from ailments as a result of exposure to ultraviolet radiation, but conversely has never sought the attention of a dermatologist to better
understand her risk for those ailments. She elaborated that, because of her female relative who suffered from skin cancer she is definitely aware and open to seeing a dermatologist. She worries about tanning, but describes how everything has their risk factors. “I do, of course there’s always a chance I could get skin cancer, but then again I could just get run over by a bus the next day too which is, ya know you just have to take your chances and hopefully rely on your gut feeling.” She further explained that until she actually has something to worry about and directly show a dermatologist, she is going to wait to seek medical consultation. She is aware of safer alternatives and has even tried spray tanning, but described that they have a more fake result than indoor tanning. She elaborated that if a satisfying spray tan product were available, then she would substitute that appearance management option for indoor tanning.

Carrie

Carrie, a professional hair stylist, preferred not disclose her age. She indicated that she began tanning at age 18 and would have begun earlier, but her mother would not grant her permission. She wanted to begin tanning before 18, because her older sisters tanned, both indoors and outdoors. Currently, Carrie tans an average of 2 to 3 days per week throughout the year, but tans less in the winter and more in the spring in preparation for summer. Carrie described her spring tanning ritual; she tans every day for approximately 10 days then tapers off to a more regular schedule. She also said that she does not tan regularly outside during the summer months. In some confusing statements, Carrie mentioned that she tans in preparation for the summer months because she burns very badly, but then stated that she does not tan outside during the summer on a regular
basis. In addition to UV exposure from tanning, Carrie uses self-tanner on a regular basis both, spray and tanning lotion.

Carrie reflected indifference to missing a regular tanning appointment, primarily because she is employed at a beauty salon that has indoor tanning facilities which are readily available to her at no cost. She described comparison of herself to her coworkers, patrons, and other women in general in terms of assessing whether she looks older or young than they do.

Carrie understood the financial element of indoor tanning. Carrie also recognized the time investment associated with outdoor tanning, stating she prefers the efficiency of indoor tanning, “fifteen minutes and you’re done!”

The group of people with whom Carrie is closest includes both family and coworkers, most of whom are women who tan. Carrie reflected that her sisters tan less than she does, but her coworkers tan more. She reiterated that her sisters influenced her to begin tanning, but now her motivation is personal. Although no one has talked to Carrie about the frequency with which she tans, she is aware that her mother disapproves. “Yeah, my mom thinks it’s terrible and I am close with my mom, but yeah my parents don’t think it’s a good idea.” Insightfully, Carrie mentioned that both of her parents suffered from skin cancer.

When asked about her self-esteem Carrie said she was “fine” with herself, but also mentioned that she needed to lose weight. She also thinks that other people think she looks “fine.” Carrie was questioned about the meaning of “fine” and she explained that fine means good. Carrie said she feels better about herself when she has a tan, but it
really only applies to the areas of her body that are exposed to other people. Carrie does not view tanning as part of her normal beauty regimen, but explained that in the winter time tanning makes her feel better because of its physical warmth. When Carrie talked about making clothing decisions based on how tan she was, she mentioned first that she does not, but followed up by stating that in the summer she just tends to wear brighter colors. She was uncertain whether her clothing choices related to her tanned skin or whether they were strictly seasonal, stating, “Just most of my winter clothes are blacks and browns and my summer clothes are bright colors.” Carrie mentioned that she tries to always cover her hair when in the tanning bed because the light changes the color of her hair and that she wears darker make-up as her tan darkens.

Carrie has undergone a long-term or invasive appearance management technique to remove unsightly moles from her neck. At first Carrie said it was only for cosmetic reasons, but also mentioned that she had them checked by a doctor who suggested she remove the moles “just in case.” Other than these moles, Carrie has not suffered from any form of cancer or ailment as a result of tanning nor has she ever visited a dermatologist to discuss her risk factors for cancer or related ailments from tanning. Carrie expressed worry about the possibility of suffering from skin cancer, perhaps because her parents experienced it, but she explained that she will only fully replace tanning with safer alternatives if she is diagnosed with skin cancer in the future.

Amy

Amy is a 37-year-old professional hair stylist who began indoor tanning at age 13. She began tanning at a very young age because she was a cheerleader and it gave her
more confidence to be in front of a crowd when she was tan. Currently (early spring), Amy’s strategy is tanning every day to develop a good “base color,” then she reduces frequency to 1 or 2 days per week. Amy described that tanning helps her deal with psoriasis. Amy explained that she definitely tans indoor more during the winter months and less in the summer because she spends more time outside. Nevertheless, Amy does maintain her tan by going to the tanning bed at least once a week in the summer.

Amy reported that she does not mind if she misses a regular tanning appointment. She does not compare herself with patrons or her coworkers, but then confided that she sometimes finds herself asking if she looks younger or older than other woman around her age explaining, “Sometimes, if I find out that somebody is the same age as me, I’ll think, well do I look younger than them or older than them or vice versa?” Amy prefers to tan outdoors because she enjoys being outside with her children. She has a very close network of family and coworkers some of whom also tan. She said that it just depends; some tan more and some less. She is not influenced by friends or family to go tanning, but mentioned that her profession requires her to look good on a daily basis.

Amy was visibly nervous and uncomfortable describing her body image. “I don’t know, I don’t really, I mean, I don’t know, I mean, I think I look fine for my age.” When prompted, she elaborately nervously, “I don’t know, I mean, I’m not one that like looks at myself and critiques myself with other people, I guess I just get more self conscious, so… if that makes sense, if that helps…” Amy continued to say meekly that people usually tell her she looks younger than she really is. She also indicated feeling less positive about her body if she has not tanned. “Um, it changes a little bit just in the fact
that I just feel ya know pasty and I think like more of the seasonal you know when it’s all
cold and yucky and drab outside, it just kind of makes me feel better just to have a little
bit of color.” Amy was unable to recognize tanning as a regular appearance management
in her regimen, and also reported that she does not make any clothing decisions based on
her tanned appearance.

Amy has never undergone an invasive appearance management technique and
does not change her beauty regimens based on her tan. Amy reported that she has never
suffered from any ailment as a result from tanning. At first Amy reported that she has
never sought medical attention from a dermatologist about her risk for ailments related to
tanning, but later shared that she has seen a dermatologist for consultation regarding
suspicious moles. Amy indicated that she does not worry about the possibility of
suffering from ill effects of tanning because her family history does not include skin
cancer. Amy indicated awareness of safer alternatives to indoor tanning, but rationalized
that she would not partake unless she is diagnosed with skin cancer.

Analysis of Collective Case Profiles

Compiling the individual interviews into a collective case profile provided an
opportunity to compare and contrast the reports of five women. The resulting analysis of
commonalities and differences produced a set of emergent overarching themes related to
behaviors and motives associated with indoor tanning. Table 2 presents the appearance
management practices reported by the five interviewees. The subjects’ attitudes toward
tanning and other appearance management techniques are summarized in Table 3.
Table 2

*Appearance Management Practices Reported*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appearance Management</th>
<th>Tina</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Monika</th>
<th>Carrie</th>
<th>Amy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage in hair color modification?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in dieting</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in an exercise program?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do clothes change according to tan level?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do make-up regimens change according to tan level?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performed long-term or invasive appearance management techniques?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Attitudes toward Tanning and other Appearance Management Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Tina</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Monika</th>
<th>Carrie</th>
<th>Amy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated worry about ill effects</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicated plans to stop tanning if ill effects occur</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to consider or use safer alternatives</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in social comparison</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicated occupation affects tanning behavior</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated rationalization for risky behavior</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicated tanning improves social anxiety</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicated tanning improves self-esteem</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicated tanning improves body image</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicated worry about aging</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Research Questions

Five specific research questions were analyzed using content analysis applied to the qualitative data generated via interviews. The first research question focused on social comparison theory, with resulting data analyzed to determine the strength of the theory’s application for the habitual tanning behaviors of the women profiled. The following two questions explored the motives for developing habitual indoor tanning behaviors and addressed connections between tanning behaviors and social anxiety, self-esteem, and body image as well as lifestyle factors. The fourth question addresses the question of life span and the practice of habitual indoor tanning. The final research question sought to understand barriers and potential catalysts to changing the risky behavior, as perceived by the women interviewed.

*Do women introduce reference comparison individuals or groups in their indoor tanning practices that are reflective of social comparison theory?*

Yes, each of the five women stated that either in their respective places of employment or with other women in their age range they are making comparisons. Mary, Monika, Carrie, and Amy each cited that they specifically will compare themselves with women who are in their age range to see if they look older or younger. Tina, the anomaly among the five women interviewed, believes that many patrons at her workplace compare themselves to her. Mary, Monika, and Amy also recognized that their occupation requires them to maintain a certain appearance that reflects youthfulness. Tina made a profound statement about the comparison of one woman to another, “I think every woman does [make social comparisons].”
All of the women focused on how their tanning practices were affected and altered by other appearance management techniques. Interestingly though, only Monika and Tina said that tanning was part of their “normal” beauty regimen, but Mary, Carrie, and Amy said it was not. In all five cases the women have cited specific instances in which tanning dominates a choice for beauty practice in another area.

*Do women who engage in habitual indoor tanning practices see/use the outcome (tanned appearance) to develop or combat social anxiety, low self-esteem, and poor body image?*

Each woman demonstrated that tanning is a deliberate appearance management technique to improve social anxiety, self-esteem, and body image. Four of five participants were strongly motivated to tan because it improved body image and boosted their self-esteem.

Each of the women cited at least one other area that changes or is altered by the level of their tanned appearance. They change another appearance management technique either make-up, clothing, dieting, or working out based upon how tan they are. All of the women change the color of their make-up to their tan, Amy was the anomaly stating that she only changes her make-up when she tans, but the other practices are unrelated to tanning. Tina, Mary, Monika, and Carrie all stated that the color and style of the clothing they wear changes based on how tan they are. Mary noted that she is uncomfortable exposing her legs unless she has a tan, and similarly, Carrie stated that she is mainly concerned with areas of her body that are exposed to other people. Monika mentioned that the colors accepted at her place of employment are black and white so she wears
those accordingly; black when she is less tan and white when tanner. Tina was focused primarily on color and said that she only wears certain colors when she is tan because they look nicer. Monika was the outlier in the group stating that her tanning practices change when she alters her exercise routine. “Well you know, um when I do workout I feel like I don’t need to tan as much because I feel like my body is getting into shape and I’m lookin’ a little better, um I start to get that lazy streak you need to make yourself feel better so you go to tanning.”

**What, if any, relationship between life span and habitual indoor tanning practices exists?**

All of the women mentioned that age was the biggest factor they use as a social comparison standard. All of the women combat the aging process with creams, serums, and gels to reduce the appearance of the lines and wrinkles. For 80 percent of the women (excluding Tina) their professional appearance is also an important factor in their comparison. Monika stated that having a good, youthful appearance will help build her business. “Oh yes one 100 percent, it sure does, ’cause if you look good doing hair then it keeps my clientele built up, keeps me lookin’ young, makes me feel younger to keep up with my appearance, I’d feel funny if I didn’t (laughs).” Amy stated that if she worked in a different profession she wouldn’t be focused so much on her appearance. “No, it just makes me feel better to have color, I think if I was in a different professional where I wasn’t in front of the mirror all day and the lights, ’cause we’ve got very harsh lights, so I think that might make a difference too.” Mary and Carrie were the only two women who said that they compare themselves to celebrities, citing age as the biggest factor.
Three of five women noted changes in hair maintenance and style; interestingly all but one woman are employed as professional hair stylists. Only one woman has undergone invasive, cosmetic procedure, and that (mole removal) seemingly had health ties in her explanation. One other subject indicated potential interest in long-term, invasive cosmetic procedures.

Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory states that people desire to make comparisons not based on subjective social standards, but rather, if no other reference point is available, individuals will make such comparisons on the basis of beauty and appearance. Our participants engaged in social comparisons of beauty and appearance using age as an underlying factor. While age is a measurable number, the women’s explanations focused not on the number of years a comparable person has been alive, but rather on how that person looks based on how old they are, and on how old the participants are. Furthermore, four out of five women found that their place of employment, which is also considered a social context, to be an important frame of reference against which they compare themselves to others. Perhaps more importantly, they feel pressured to maintain a certain realized standard of beauty so that they can prosper in their careers.

What influence do the adult women’s lifestyles play in their use of habitual indoor tanning, and if so how?

Of the five women interviewed, four have careers as professional hair stylists and the fifth has a family-owned tanning salon. The four stated that their professions added social pressure to maintaining their appearances. Each of the five women referenced a
particular group of people, both family and friends with whom they are closest. Within each of the five groups, the women identified members that also tan. Tina mentioned family, but spoke at length about the young teenage girls who patronize her family-owned tanning salon. Tina, in particular, tans more frequently than her close friends and family and definitely is the chief influence on others to tan. Mary identified her children as the group of people with whom she is closest. Mary is the owner of a beauty salon and only began tanning indoors upon purchasing that beauty salon. Mary’s lifestyle as a salon owner is a big influence on her practice of indoor tanning. Monika and Amy shared similar identities in that they both tan as part of their professions, but originally started tanning for reasons not related to their careers. Looking at each of the five women in this study, lifestyle plays the biggest role in each of the indoor tanning practices. Having a connection to the beauty industry and having a connection to free or reduced priced tanning puts each of these women in a position to want to engage in indoor tanning practices more often.

What barriers exist that prevent behavior change with respect to the use of indoor tanning as a type of appearance management?

Time, convenience, process of application, and outcome were all cited as reasons for not partaking in safer alternatives to indoor tanning. Each woman was aware of safer alternatives such as spray tanning, tanning lotions, sunscreens, bronzing applications, etc. Furthermore, each of the women has used at least one of the aforementioned alternatives, but adoption of these alternatives to indoor tanning has not been implemented by any of the women. Monika, Amy, and Carrie have used spray tanning and tanning lotions, but feel the results render a different appearance than the traditional indoor tan.
On top of the appearance management issues related to indoor tanning, each woman cited reasons for indoor tanning: relaxation, mood booster, warmth, etc. The alternatives don’t offer those outlets. In addition to the fact that results from the alternatives are not the same as indoor tanning, participants’ feelings associated with the process also are not similar. The barrier that exists is while tanning provides an essential component for each woman’s appearance management technique; it also provides an opportunity to alter one’s feeling and outlook on life, even if it is just for a few minutes.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

Implementation of the case study method was essential to the success of this research study. Each woman spoke openly about her practices related to indoor tanning and the rationale she articulated for her behavior. Although generalization of results was not the goal of this exploratory study, overarching themes of self-esteem, satisfaction of appearance, occupation, desire to curb the aging process, and disregard of health risks emerged through collective analysis of the five case profiles. The five overarching themes offer insight into the motives for long-term, habitual tanning behaviors as well as support for the relationship between appearance management and social comparison theory. As Berg (2007) suggested, even with a relatively small number of interviews completed, similar patterns of behavior related to using indoor tanning as an appearance management regimen emerged among the women in this study suggest reasonably broad application of the findings, particularly for the Southeastern Ohio region.

Among this sample of women, close reference individuals and groups emerged as stronger comparison resources than societal ideals of beauty. This is most likely associated with occupation, location (rural, small towns), and age. All of the women interviewed cited that their work environments heavily influential their desires to maintain certain appearance standards that included a tan. The geographical location and age of the subjects played an important role in social comparisons. These women live and work in the Appalachian region of Ohio, an area where year-round outdoor tanning is not possible. A regional, socially accepted appearance standard that includes perpetually
tanned skin is evident among these women and their social circles. Furthermore, these women, all of whom were middle aged, noted a change in their beauty expectation due to aging; all acknowledged seeking youthful appearances. Relative to aging, the social comparisons referenced had clearly shifted for these women. Several indicated that, as they have aged, they are more concerned with their comparative appearance relative to friends and acquaintances rather than relative to celebrities or youthful beauty icons.

**Emergent Overarching Themes of Women Who are Lifelong Habitual Indoor Tanners**

The results showed that all four participants identified appearance management goals (self-esteem, body image, social anxiety, and gaining) as motives for habitual tanning behaviors. However, body image, self-esteem, and desire to curb the aging process emerged as the strongest underlying motives for habitual tanning as compared to managing social anxiety.

Five overarching themes emerged through analysis of the data: self-esteem, satisfaction with appearance, occupation, desire to curb the aging process, and disregard for health risks. The common threads underlying these themes represented in the collective case profiles support the strong connection between appearance management and indoor tanning behaviors. Ironically, effects of UVR, including increased development of wrinkles, dark skin spots, and leathery skin texture contradict some of the desired improvements women typically seek through tanning. Furthermore, the health-related consequences associated with indoor tanning, including increased likelihood of several types of skin cancer, present substantial risks related to tanning proved strong
rationale to better understand motives for habitual tanning behaviors as a first step to implementing change.

Social comparison theory helps explain themes associated with indoor tanning behaviors. Clearly, the women compared their tanned appearances with other women, and used their assessments of these comparisons to form self-esteem and appearance satisfaction levels. Furthermore, tanned appearances are documented as in the literature as a means of reducing social anxiety. Participants’ occupations provided a forum to support social comparisons, and their need to appear tanned was related to their roles as beauty agents. All women viewed their tanned appearances as a compensation for an aging body and a way to reconnect with a youthful appearance.

Self-Esteem

All of the women interviewed stated that, in one capacity or another, they “feel better” when they are tan. Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory suggests that humans, as social beings, make comparisons of themselves with other people based on subjective information such as beauty. Each of the five women in this study stated that she compares herself to other women, and feels good about her self-assessment relative to her observations of other women, particularly women in her personal age category.

The subjects did not necessarily identify self-esteem as a positive outcome of her tanning behavior, although they all made comments regarding their desires to tan because it helps them feel better. Interestingly, conflicting statements often emerged in conversations related to self-esteem, evidenced by their statements about whether to wear particular items of clothing or certain colors based on their current skin tones. Such
verbal contradictions provided evidence that, although the women tanned to build their self-esteem, they also felt outside pressure for approval. Otherwise, activities such as monitoring one’s wardrobe in preparation for social interactions would not take place.

While indoor tanning practices played an important role in the physical factors of appearance management, it also played a role in managing emotional factors. All five women interviewed remarked that they have a change in self-esteem based on how tan they are.

*Satisfaction with Appearance*

Related to self-esteem, and in support of social comparison theory, was the recognition that satisfaction with self-appearance depends on each woman’s perceived appearance in relation to her assessment of other women in a given cohort group. Four of the five women reported that their exercise regimens changed based on their current tan situations. All interviewees indicated that they alter their make-up based on their tanned appearances. Appearance management was clearly a deliberate behavior for each woman in this study; in order to be satisfied with their appearances, they all noted that a tan is necessary. Furthermore, they alter other appearance management techniques in response to tan levels. Thus, tanning emerged as a primary appearance management behavior, with other appearance management techniques modified accordingly.

The concept of appearance satisfaction was further supported through conversations about other risky and invasive procedures. One of the five participants, Carrie, said she had unsightly moles removed from her neck; Monika believed that she might have facial cosmetic surgery in the future to reverse the look of crow’s feet. All of
the participants in the study were aware of the health risks associated with exposure to UVR; some even spoke about family or friends who had suffered from skin cancer as a result of tanning. Despite the thorough understanding of the risks, participants communicated that they had no immediate plans to stop tanning.

**Occupation**

Interestingly, while a focus on occupation was not premeditated, the environment that the women live and work clearly played an important role in tanning behaviors exhibited by them. Four of the five women interviewed have professional careers as hair stylists. All four believed that their desire to be tan resulted from their work environments. A general statement was made that in order to keep a steady clientele base, one must look a certain way. More specifically, all four commented that working in the beauty industry was a catalyst for indoor tanning practices.

Furthermore, participants communicated that coworkers within the beauty industry also tan and, thus, it is socially unacceptable not to be tan while employed at their hair salons. One of the participants, Monika, stated that there are some employees at her particular salon who could benefit socially from an increase in tanning. Therefore, social comparisons heavily impact each of the five emergent themes in some way.

**Desire to Curb the Aging Process**

The most contradictory statement in the present study was made in regard to the aging process. All five women stated that they worry about aging. Four of the five women actively use antiaging creams, serums, and lotions to combat the aging process.
All five women stated that they make comparisons with women who are in their age range and often consider whether they look younger or older than other women.

The focus on aging presents complexity to the motives for tanning, because exposure to UVR has been scientifically proven to burn, wrinkle, and scar the skin, resulting in skin that appears older than it actually is. One participant noted that there is a particular level of tan that looks good and that other levels of tanning look fake and rubbery.

*Disregard for Health-Related Risks*

The American Academy of Dermatology (2010) authored a report confirming a relationship between sunburn and skin cancer with even moderated tanning. UVR from the sun, tanning beds, or sun lamps may cause skin cancer and can have a damaging effect on the immune system. UVR also can cause premature aging of the skin, giving it a wrinkled, leathery appearance (American Academy of Dermatology, 2010).

All of the five women rationalized their tanning practices and spoke fervently about perceived gains versus the potential consequences. The aforementioned areas of self-esteem, satisfaction of appearance, occupation, and curbing the aging process were legitimized by each of the women and, in any other context, one would agree with the women’s motives.

The women focused on the present situation in which they are trying to create a positive life for themselves and their families, but apparently did not give great weight to the potential health risks they face by continually and habitually practicing indoor
tanning. This appears to be a choice to invest in instant gratification rather than long-term physical health.

Conclusion

The emergent themes harvested from this study present a strong foundation for understanding motives of women who habitually participate in the activity of indoor tanning. This exploratory research provided insight from women who themselves demonstrated repetitive appearance management regimens that result in positive social comparisons in spite of known long-term risks, both for appearance and health. Among the group of female participants in this study, the desire to achieve appearance outcomes leading to positive self-esteem and positive self comparisons in social peer groups, were primary motives to continue the appearance management behavior of indoor tanning.

Implications

As part of the interview process, each of the women spoke about their knowledge and use of alternatives deemed safer than indoor tanning and exposure to UVR. The women’s demonstration of such knowledge provides a positive outlook about whether changes can be made in women who tan habitually and their connected social networks. The purpose of the study was not to educate or degrade the participants, but rather to begin conversations about tanning and underlying habitual tanning motives. Ultimately, understanding motives and potential barriers to behavior change is a first step toward changing appearance management regimens and baseline criteria used by women when evaluating their appearances within social comparison situations. Changing harmful
tanning regimens is a recognizable area for education and preventive practices in the area of health and fitness that emerged from this thesis.

Limitations

Limiting the number of interview participants was necessary for harvesting a rich data set. However, a limited number of interviews decreased the ability to generalize results. The small number of interviews enabled each interviewee to speak at length about her particular situation; therefore the snapshot view of each participant’s tanning provided an opportunity to explore motives for behaviors and to identify emergent themes. However, it also presented limitations in motives and behaviors that are likely to occur over time. The recruiting process of participants was constrained by a relatively homogenous population in Southeast Ohio. A more diverse and larger population could have provided a more robust data set from which analysis could have been generated.

Suggestions for Future Research

To build upon the findings of this study, it would be beneficial to conduct interviews at different times of the year and as seasons change to determine whether responses change according to season. Additionally, longitudinal interviews that would allow observations of women’s perceptions and appearance management regimens over time could provide insight regarding changes in such behaviors, particularly with relationship to aging. Future research should recruit from a more diverse population, expand ethnicity of participants, include comparative interviews with individuals who do not participate in tanning, and also expand interviews to include male participants whom engage in indoor tanning.
The emergent themes harvested from this study present a strong foundation for further research regarding tanning and other risky appearance management techniques. While participants had the opportunity to speak at length about their motives for indoor tanning, many areas remain to be explored. As the economic, social, and political climate continues to change in the U.S., the practice of indoor tanning will be affected. Finally, as more individuals realize the consequences of indoor tanning, opportunities for public health education should be available to the general population. Development of such information, strategies to encourage adoption of tanning alternatives, and communication of these options all present further research opportunities.
REFERENCES


