POSITIVE BODY IMAGE INTERVENTIONS FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Positive Body Image Interventions for Adolescent Girls

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This thesis examines three positive body image interventions for girls in the United States and is supported with new evidence from a focus group discussion. Children are constantly bombarded with messages from the media, society, their peers, as well as countless other sources that tell them they are not good enough, smart enough, attractive enough, or thin enough. As a result, more and more children are putting their health and lives at risk by engaging in dangerous behaviors to achieve what they think are the ideal physique. The interventions that this study examines can be applied at the family level, individual level and cultural level. Two of the interventions focus on books; one is a self-help book, *Beautiful You* (2010), while the other is targeted for a family approach, *The Body Image Survival Guide for Parents* (2013). The third intervention this thesis examines is a New York City public health campaign called *The New York City Girls Project*. The support of the focus group included insight, views and real like experiences from current undergraduate females on the topic of positive body image interventions. While all three interventions have advantages and disadvantages and with conclusions

from the focus group, this thesis argues that a multifaceted approach is needed when

promoting a positive body image to young females.

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Preface

I chose to study and research positive body image interventions because I imagine they are something everyone can benefit from. Poor self-image affects individuals of all ages and is not limited to any socioeconomic group, race, or culture. Negative body image is something that affects all individuals, especially young women. Body image has always been an area of interest for me, even when I was first introduced to the Women's and Gender Studies field as an undergrad.

It amazes me how we internalize all the horrible messages that society is constantly displaying and we in turn, inflict them upon ourselves. I understand the struggle of having a poor self-image can take over one's mind and can be difficult to come back from, which is why I feel the importance of exploring positive body image interventions. Through my focus group I was able to hear real life situations of how young women feel pressured to look a certain way and to gather information on valuable intervention options.

My first chapter is a cultural and historical analysis of body image that has substantial confirmation from various feminist scholars. The next chapter examines an intervention at the family level, *The Body Image Survival Guide for Parents* (2013). This chapter displays the crucial role families have on one's self-image. My third chapter explores a self-help book, *Beautiful You* (2010), which is an intervention focused on the individual level. Lastly, chapter four highlights an intervention at the cultural level of a Public Health Campaign, *The New York City Girls Project.* I believe we need to start protecting the body image of females at a young age through the various interventions I explore.

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Chapter One

Body Image: A Cultural and Historical Analysis

Introduction

Day after day, children are bombarded with messages from the media, society, their peers, as well as countless other sources. These sources tell them that they are not good enough, smart enough, attractive enough, and certainly not thin enough. As a result, more and more children are putting their health and lives at risk by engaging in dangerous behaviors to achieve what they think is the ideal physique. As Marci Warhaft–Nadler writes, "It's hard to believe, but research confirms that children have adopted society's warped view on body shape and size by the time they are just five years old" (Warhaft-Nadler, 2013).

A shift has taken place throughout society as technology is constantly on the rise. With no escape from the media and advertisements, the pop culture-driven, Generation Z[1] is attached to iPhones, androids, and tablets at all times. Unfortunately, technology and social media are dictating their lives. The media and entertainment industries are oppressors against women and their bodies. Our bodies are a form of communication to express who we are, yet we live in a society

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[1] Generation Z are individuals born between the years of 1995 and 2009. They are part of a generation that is global, social, visual and technological. They are the most connected, educated and sophisticated generation ever. They are the early adopters, the brand influencers, the social media drivers and the pop-culture leaders (http://generationz.com.au/characteristics/).

focused on physical identity and we become fearful to show the public who we truly are. Girls today are concerned with their appearance as a primary expression of their individual identities. Today's teens are worrying about fitting in with the rest of the crowd while also trying to stand out as individuals. Individuals use their appearance– bodies, clothing, and style to express their inner convictions, pride, affiliations, identities, insecurities and their weaknesses.

Body image has been an ongoing concern for females for over a hundred years. Women once were lacing themselves into corsets and teaching their adolescent daughters to do the same thing while today's teens are shopping for cropped shirts or thong bikinis on their own (Brumberg, 1997). Young girls in American society are left unsupported and extremely vulnerable to the excess of popular culture and to pressure from peers without many societal protections. It has gotten worse with the passage of time. "The current body problem is not just an external issue resulting from a lack of societal vigilance or adult support; it has also become an internal, psychological problem. Girls today make the body into an all-consuming project in ways young women of the past did not," explains historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg. In the beginning years of the twenty-first century, the female body poses an immense problem for American girls, and it does so because of the culture in which we live (Brumberg, 1997).

With our technology-based culture, children are not physically active because they are sitting in front of televisions and computers during their free time. Several studies supported by the magazine *WomensHealth*, have found that children and teens spend an average of nearly six and a half hours a day using some type of media, with

television as the most dominant. On average, children ages eight to eighteen spend three hours a day watching television and up to four hours when recorded programs are incorporated. With children viewing so much television, they see an average of 40,000 ads a year (Dittmann, 2004). The majority of ads targeted to children are for food and the average child sees eleven food related commercials per hour during weekend morning programing.

Young individuals are in a stage of life where they want to be accepted by their peers, they want to be loved and they want to be successful. The media as a whole creates ideal beauty for both men and women. It also sets expectations and pressures individuals to "fit in."

Unfortunately, most of the media we are exposed to does not show individuals in a realistic way. Characters on television are often shown with unrealistic bodies. Women are shown as too thin and men are shown with larger-than-life muscles. Photographs in magazines or billboards are edited on the computer to erase flaws and imperfections. Even though we know that the images we see are not normal or real, they still have a massive impact on us. Many teens and young adults in the United States want to be like the characters they see on TV. Also, many forms of media do not show the variety of cultures that exists in the world. According to Common Sense Media, seventy four percent of the characters on TV are Caucasian, and sixty four percent of video game characters are males.

With technology constantly on the rise and the future of where it will take us unknown, body image concerns are following right behind it. Being less active and

surrounded more and more by the media and advertisements, children have a greater risk for development of negative body images. It is important for educators, parents, society and the media to intervene and protect the children around us by promoting a healthy body image for them.

Overview

As a feminist scholar in training, my goals in this thesis are to analyze three types of interventions that promote positive ways to empower children around us, and to bring awareness to our society about the importance of a healthy body image. In doing this, I wish to break down the beauty ideal standards that are set for individuals throughout society. This examination will review three examples of interventions: one that can be applied at the family level, one at the individual level, and one at the broader cultural level.

In this thesis I use a theoretical framework, original research and textual analysis. I use findings from a focus group that I conducted on positive body image interventions. The group, conducted in July 2015, consisted of six Rutgers University undergraduate females. The topics we discussed included first recognition of body image, family influence, pros and cons of self-help books and lastly the role of public awareness on one's body image. I recruited the participants through the Women's and Gender Studies undergraduate listserv, and by reaching out to related student organizations on campus. In addition, I was able to pull in a few students that were sitting in the student center waiting for their next class to begin.

Two of the participants were nineteen years old, three were twenty and the other was twenty-one. Many of them disclosed their racial background during the discussion. The focus group consisted of two African American girls, one Haitian, one Hispanic, one Filipino and one Caucasian girl. We all sat in a circle, including a note taker that I had with me, and I explained the purpose and the process of how the focus group would proceed. The purpose was to learn what types of positive body image interventions have the most influential impact. I explained that everything said in the focus group was completely confidential and while the discussion would be recorded, I would not disclose any personal information or link any comments to their identity. I made sure the environment was very casual and relaxed and that there was no order in providing answers.

As we got started all participants went around the room and introduced themselves and then I began asking questions. As thoughts or opinions popped into their heads, the participants voiced their opinions one at a time. While the students were sharing their thoughts, I was probing the discussion by bringing attention to culture, age, race, gender, popular culture, technology, etc. By probing the participants, they were able to engage with one another and form a deeper dialogue.

While exploring these interventions through close readings I hope to bring about social change, and raise consciousness. I draw on the work of Susan Bordo, Joan Jacaobs Brumberg, bell hooks, Abigail Saguy, Rebecca Walker, Wendy Simonds, David and Myra Sadker, and Karen Zittleman.

The family level intervention I examine through a feminist lens is exemplified by the work done by a body image specialist, Marci Warhaft-Nadler. She wrote a book for parents in an effort to help them promote healthy and positive body images for their children. Warhaft-Nadler tackles the tough questions that children and parents are faced with when negotiating aspects of body image and self-esteem. In her book, *The Body Image Survival Guide For Parents (2013)*, she addresses all ages ranging from newborn to adolescents.

In a societal context where body obsessions coincide with alarming rates of obesity among American children, *The Body Image Survival Guide for Parents* is a useful guidebook that is meant to educate parents on body image. It should be required reading for every parent. It may be shocking to learn that body image issues can begin as young as the toddler years and can continue through the teenage years and beyond. Two thirds of the participants from my focus group reported first recognizing their body image during elementary school. Others noted they first became aware of their body image in middle school or high school. For those that first recognized their body image during elementary school, they reported being aware of it at such a young age due to early development, and peer comparison. They explained this was an awkward scenario for them especially when going to the beach and having to figure out what type of bathing suite they should be wearing.

While girls are often the focus of eating disorders, the author, a mother of sons, dismisses that myth quickly, saying that the self-esteem issues underlying body image extend to boys as well. For the purpose of this thesis and with time constraints in mind, I

will focus primarily on female body image, but do keep in mind that body image is something that affects individuals of any race, class, culture, age, and sex.

Early chapters of *The Body Image Survival Guide for Parents* are broken down by age range, and then later by issues that could arise within every age range. Included is advice to parents about how to handle their own weight issues, their child's weight issues, and sections about outside influences, such as school and media.

The book is easy to read, with practical dos and don'ts, real-life anecdotes peppered throughout, and many helpful "Sticky Questions" and "Solid Answers." For example, if your child asks, "Do I need to go on a diet?" Warhaft-Nadler advises parents to respond: "Nope. Diets are not healthy. But we can all try to make better choices with the foods we eat to make sure our bodies are getting the healthy ingredients they need to help us feel our best." Unfortunately, negative influences arise from multiple sources, including peers, the media, and even within one's own family. More than one adult interviewed for the book still reacted at memories of being called names by family members or teachers. The author is quite credible, as the book was not written from an outsider's viewpoint. The author acknowledges that she herself struggled with an eating disorder for many years, even after she became a mother. Currently she is a body image advocate and founder of the "Fit versus Fiction" Project; she leads workshops for children to help them eradicate negative body images and boost confidence. She shows in her book that body image and self-esteem are inextricably linked. Warhaft-Nadler includes a reference guide linking to Internet publications and websites that promote positive body images. Perhaps the most rewarding part of the book is the collection of

"Proud to be me"[2] comments from real children ranging in age from four to sixteen: "I'm cool because I'm strong and nice," "I like myself because I am helpful to other people and very fun," and "I know I'm healthy and great just the way I am and I don't care what anybody else thinks."

Overall this book provides parents with specific, practical ways to combat the body pressures that their children face in today's culture. The scenario based question and answer format is fantastic for parents with children at all stages of their development. I appreciated the fact that Warhaft-Nadler discussed body image issue pertaining to males as well as females.

The second intervention I examine is a self-help book titled *Beautiful You: A Daily Guide to Radical Self-Acceptance* by Rosie Molinary (2010). *Beautiful you* was written for young females in an effort to help them realize their own power and brilliance. This book is filled with exercises and ideas to help women achieve their potential every day. The value of Molinary's book comes from doing the work it entails, through journeying toward insight and action through the exercises and reflections.

The secret to success with *Beautiful you* is completing its guided daily practices. These daily practices yield new patterns of thinking, and those patterns ultimately can yield new habits that will renew a sense of self in a positive, dynamic, healthy way. The

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[2] Proud to be me has a similar purpose in mind as the feminist *Free To Be…You And Me* (1972) book and music by Marlo Thomas. Thomas wanted to help children be unencumbered by stereotypes and to capitalize on their unique strengths and understand that whatever their gender, race or ethnic identity or their economic origins, they were free to pursue their talents and their dreams. http://www.freetobefoundation.org/.

book moves individuals to find clarity and it encourages readers to develop their own insights through compassionate observations and careful execution. By giving individuals the opportunity to consider, observe, do and be, this book will help females recognize what is really beautiful, which is being who they are. "We can all grow, no matter our history. We can all recognize our brilliance. Recognizing beauty, as it turns out, is a choice," explains Molinary. "We can see beauty the way the world hands it to us or we can see it the way we want to see it" (Molinary, 2010).   I examine this kind of positive body image intervention within the broader context of self-help books and the literature in them. Simonds reports that self-help books propose to help women find out about themselves and to teach them effective ways of being. She also explains, self-reflective activity allows women to seek a deep connection with the material they are reading and delivers the opportunity to "read" themselves. Molinary argues that the key to feeling better isn't looking better. "It is feeling better about our lives and better understanding what our bodies really are – vehicles in which we can experience life. Our bodies are not life itself; they are objects of motion, not admiration" reasons Molinary. Molinary writes:

> If we stop the world's racket and engage deliberately in our lives, we change ourselves. *Beautiful You* provides the tools – vision, passion, purpose, resilience, productivity – for every woman who wants to see beauty in a way that is true to who she is and not the way the world hands it to her.

The final intervention I turn to address is the *New York City Girls Project*. The *New York City Girls Project* is a public education campaign launched in October 2013 by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Deputy Mayor for Health and Services Linda Gibbs, and

Executive Director for the Women's Commission Andrea Shapiro Davis. This campaign is geared toward girls age's seven to twelve and is displayed on buses and phone kiosks throughout the New York City subway. The campaign featured a diverse group of girls preforming activities such as reading, playing sports, and drawing with the words: "I'm a girl; I'm smart; a leader, adventurous, friendly, and funny. I'm beautiful the way I am." The campaign invites girls to share what makes them beautiful the way they are by providing a hash tag, #ImAGirl to contribute to social media. Like most government funded campaigns, the NYC Girls Project had a short run: the ads ran in phone kiosks and bus shelters for four weeks and on the subway for eight weeks.

Through this campaign New York City has become the first city in the nation to tackle the issues of girls' self-esteem and body image. Recognizing that girls as young as six and seven are struggling with body image and self-esteem problems, this campaign is a public education self-esteem initiative to help girls believe their value comes from their character, skills and attributes, not their appearance. According to one observer, the "multi-pronged, cross-agency approach will seek to change social norms with a public education campaign that provides a counter message of positive aspirational images to combat media that girls are influenced by every day and a curriculum that promotes healthy eating, positive body image and self-esteem and teaches girls to think critically about, and challenge, constructed media images" (Shaw, 2013).

A girls' self-esteem curriculum, *Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health and Leadership* accompanies the public education campaign. This curriculum is primarily used in the United States, on the east coast however is has

emerged in other countries such as England, Turkey, and Canada. The teachers who use this curriculum emphasize girls' personal power and overall mental and physical wellbeing. According to the authors, "This eight-session program, designed for girls 10 - 15 years old is the first of its kind to show sustained, positive changes in girls' body image, body satisfaction and body esteem."

(http://www.nyc.gov/html/girls/html/about/about.shtml, 2013)

This initiative aimed at positive aspects of body image does a great deal in attempting to empower girls and young women. One of the biggest challenges girls face is the unhappiness and pressure that results from the media, which "presents images that tend to portray a narrow standard of beauty" (NYC Girls Project, 2014). Other challenges girls grapple with include smoking, alcohol abuse, bullying, early onset of sexual activity and obesity.

Body Image through Time and Culture

Since the 1800's the body has been manipulated and shaped to the ideological contours of the social and cultural influence in place. While body image is something we all develop and are aware of, it often goes unnoticed. Planned Parenthood defines body image as how we feel and what we think when we look at ourselves. It is also how we imagine others to view ourselves. Not only is it about our appearance but it also includes our feelings about our bodies and all their parts (Planned Parenthood, 2014).

According to *TeensHealth*, body image is how you view your physical self, including whether you feel you are attractive and whether others like your looks. For many individuals, especially those in their early teens, body image can be closely linked

to self-esteem. "Self-esteem is all about how much you feel you are worth and how much you feel other people value you," according to the *TeensHealth* website. Self-esteem is important because feeling good about yourself can affect your mental health and how you behave (TeensHealth, 2014).

Author Nathaniel Branden has offered a helpful definition of self-esteem. "Self-esteem is confidence in our ability to think, confidence in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life and confidence in our right to be successful and happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants, achieve our values, and enjoy the fruits of our efforts," he writes (*Branden*, 2010, pg. 122). Given this definition, it is clear the development of self-esteem should begin early in life and be strengthened as an individual grows and matures.

Bell hooks has written about how the female search for love has to begin with the work of self-love. Hooks believes that the old saying, "if you don't love yourself you cannot love others," is true. It is difficult for females to love themselves but at the same time they are willing to love someone else. "As long as patriarchy remains in place, independent, powerful self-loving women will always "threaten" the status quo," argues hooks (hooks, 2010, pg. 167). The question is why do women have such a hard time dealing with self-love?

Our body image is shaped primarily from the people around us, as well as our culture and the media. Our culture and the media provide each and every one of us with a role that is expected behavior associated with a status (Lindsey, 2010). The early teen years are a time when adolescents become more aware of celebrities and media images

as well as how peers look and how they themselves fit in. At this time, children might start to compare themselves with other people or media images. All of this can affect how they feel about themselves and their bodies as they are growing.

Many of the beliefs we have about the way women and men should look come from the models and celebrities we see in the media. Most models and celebrities do not portray how most average Americans look. "For example, on average women who are models have very different builds. They weigh 23 percent less than women who are not models," according to Planned Parenthood. The bodies we see in everyday life are much more diverse and unique than those we see in the media.

My focus group raised the issue of society getting away from the skinny model ideal because all of sudden being "thicker" is what is currently in. They blame this "thick movement" on celebrity, Kim Kardashian. Ironically, the focus group described being "thick" as having thighs and curves but a flat stomach. Or in some cases it's okay to have a "little bit of a pouch." Overall, "you need a huge hourglass figure, "36, 24, 36, being thick in the right places." One member of the focus group brought up Kim Kardashian's Waist Trainer, which is similar to a corset and is supposed to shrink your stomach however it is promoted as making one feel sexy and confident. The participants of my focus group agreed having a large stomach is what leads women to be considered fat.

One's body image may change throughout life experiences. Puberty and adolescence are times of significant physical and psychological change in young people. Many individuals struggle with their self-esteem and body image when they begin puberty because it is a time when the body goes through many changes. These changes,

combined with wanting to feel accepted by peers, leads to comparing one's self with others. The key here is that everyone grows or develops at different rates and in different ways. Awareness of appearance often intensifies during these years. "Adolescence is associated with psychological risk and vulnerability for girls. Its onset is accompanied by decreases in self-esteem, as well as increases in body dissatisfaction and rates of depression among girls" (Gordon, 2008, pg. 245). In our society, which is highly focused on appearance, body image becomes central to a person's feelings or self-esteem and self-worth during this time.

It is important to understand that body image is not only formulated from within. Everything and everyone around us is extremely influential to our body image and self–esteem. In a study on the objectification theory where they tested the anticipation of male and female gaze on appearance in western culture, Calogero reported the implicit and explicit sexual objectification of the female body produces a multitude of negative consequences for women (Calogero, 2004, pg. 16). The anticipation of being gazed at and evaluated is a defining feature of self-objectification and how it exerts its effects. "According to objectification theory, self-objectification is the result of internalizing the sexually objectifying male gaze. Therefore, it was reasoned here that anticipating a male gaze would produce greater body shame, social physique anxiety, and intent to diet when compared to anticipating a female gaze" (Calogero, 2004, pg. 17). The power and authority that men hold in our society is reflected on the way women think and feel about themselves when being viewed by men. Women

should be able to have a mind of their own and stand up for whom they are rather than having to worry about who is watching them and outsiders opinions.

Not only will one develop positive and negative images about their body from the people around them but also from the culture they belong to. For example, different cultures have different definitions of "ideals" of what beauty is and this can severely alter one's body image. In Western societies, the ideal woman is depicted as thin. For the past forty years, women have indicated positive attitudes toward a slender body (Demarest & Allen, 2000). Moreover, body-shape satisfaction among women during that period was reported to be low. In fact, the desire to be thin has been related to serious eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa. Researchers have attributed eating disorders to popular media images of women emphasizing that thinness is fashionable. This phenomenon is generally a characteristic only of women. Gender differences exist in several body-related thoughts and activities but the most robust differences pertain to women's affective concerns about shape and weight (Demarest & Allen, 2000).

Differences in body image, dieting, and eating disordered behavior among Caucasians and ethnic minorities have been demonstrated in children, adolescents and adult women. "In a national survey, Cash and Henry (1995) found high levels of body dissatisfaction among women in general have been found, while body images were less negative among African American women than among Anglo-American or Hispanic Women" (Demarest; Allen, 2010). Also, the incidence of eating disorders has been found to be significantly lower among Black women than among White women.

Scholars explain these differences as being due to burying cultural ideals of appropriate thinness (Altabe, 1996). It is often assumed that these differences are due to more positive body images and a greater acceptance of larger body sizes among Black women than among White women. It has also been suggested that Black women are more tolerant about being overweight. For instance, African American women have a greater window of acceptable weight, and African American women describing themselves as normal weight are significantly heavier than Caucasian women who believe they are normal weight. Additionally, African Americans differ from Caucasians in their belief that weight is infinitely mutable and easy to alter. However, a number of researchers have begun to look at different sociocultural influences among minorities and the influence of acculturation (Parker, Nichter, Nichter, Vuckovic, Sims & Ritenbaugh, 1995).

Results of recent nationwide surveys have revealed that White and Hispanic girls perceived themselves to be overweight even when their weight to height fell within "normal" parameters as established by the National Center for Health Statistics (Parker et al., 1995). By comparison, African American adolescent females were found to be less likely to perceive themselves as overweight. It has also been noted that both African American and White adolescents maintain distorted perceptions of their body weight, but in opposite directions. African American adolescents of normal and heavy weight tend to perceive themselves as thinner than they actually are, while White adolescents of thin and normal weight perceive themselves as heavier than they actually are (Parker et al., 1995).

In other cases, African American female adolescents were less preoccupied with weight and dieting concerns than White adolescent females (Parker et al., 1995). In an item-by-item comparison, African American adolescents had fewer thoughts about dieting, were less fearful of weight gain, and had less negative valuation of overeating. Overall, African American girls were more likely to be engaged in weight gaining than weight loss efforts when compared to their White and Hispanic counterparts (Parker et al., 1995). These instances call attention to differences in standards of acceptable weight and their variability across cultures.

Culture is a powerful determinant of body preference (Thompson & Smolak, 2001). In general Black females tend to associate positive characteristics such as power, health and well-being with heavier women. They also appear to be much less rigid in their conceptualization of their self-worth than their White counterparts, such that they derive a greater sense of identity from individuality, personal style and attitude than from body shape alone (Thompson & Smolak). Preferred body shapes among Black adolescent females have been found to be more strongly influenced by immediate family members and adult role models than those of White adolescent females, which were more influenced by peers and the media (Parnell et al., 1996). Furthermore, rather than desiring thinner body shapes, non-obese Black girls have been shown to hold body ideals that are actually heavier than their own current weights (Parnell et al., 1996). As an additional consideration, age and degree of exposure to United States culture also affect preference for a thinner body type (Thompson & Smolak, 2001).

Standards for body image and beauty among African American adolescents can be summed up in what African American girls term "looking good" (Parker, Nichter, Nichter, Vuckovic, Sims & Ritenbaugh, 1995). "Looking good" or "got it goin' on" entails making what you've got work for you, by creating and presenting a sense of style (Parker, Nichter, Nichter, Vuckovic, Sims & Ritenbaugh, 1995). A recent article on body size values among White and African American women reported that "looking good" among African American women is related to public image and overall attractiveness rather than to weight. Adolescent informants explained that regardless of a girl's body size or shape, height, weight, skin color, hairstyle, etc., if women can clothe and groom themselves and have the personality to carry off their personal style, then they are "looking good" (Parker, Nichter, Nichter, Vuckovic, Sims & Ritenbaugh, 1995).

Among Hispanic females of Latin American descent, adolescents who immigrated to the United States before age seventeen were more likely to adopt a thin body type than those immigrating after age sixteen (Thompson & Smolak). There is a direct link between culture, language, food, customs, traditions and body image (Pompper & Koenig, 2004). As scholars Pompper and Keonig write, "your customs and morality are determined by your ethnicity, your tradition, and the food that you eat" (Pompper & Koenig, 2004). As I have tried to demonstrate, body image is something that is seen across all cultures and ethnicities. Due to lack of time, and to narrow the purpose of this paper, I will focus in this thesis on Western societies, specifically White Angelo-American culture.

Along with culture and ethnicity, family life and schools can also negatively (or positively) influence a person's body image. Parents or even coaches might be focused on looking a certain way or encouraging children and adolescents to "make weight" for a sports team. This can set a standard for children to live up to someone else's expectations. Family members might struggle with their own body images or criticize their children's looks. According to *WomensHealth* magazine, young girls are more likely to have ideas about dieting when their mothers diet. Children pick up on comments about dieting concepts that may seem harmless, such as limiting high-fat foods or eating less. Yet, as girls enter their teen years, having ideas about dieting can lead to problems. "Many teenage girls of average weight think they are overweight and are not satisfied with their bodies. Having extreme weight concerns - acting on those concerns – can harm girls' social, physical and emotional growth. Actions such as skipping meals or taking diet pills can lead to poor nutrition and difficulty learning. Children may also experience pressure from peers through hurtful teasing about the way they look or how they perform" (WomensHealth, 2009). This image or ideal that is presented to us throughout society in various forms, piles on the pressure for individuals to look and act a certain way.

Individuals who accept the way they look and feel about their bodies a majority of the time, have a positive body image. These individuals have learned to be proud of who they are despite what society is telling them. Having a positive body image does not depend on a person's appearance; it is based on one's personal feelings about one's body. Part of having a positive body image is thinking about the way you physically feel

and what your body can do – not just the way you look. Those individuals who hold a positive body image are true to themselves in that they see themselves as who they really are. According to Planned Parenthood, "many people with a positive body image know that certain parts of their body may not be the same as someone else's, but they accept, appreciate and even love the difference." Individuals with a positive body image also understand that their looks do not determine their self-worth. Confidence is born from proof, and proof of self-worth comes when one has cultivated and embraced their whole self. Molinary writes, "A positive self-esteem comes with knowing your truth, your reality and arriving at a self-mastery that allows for resilience, pro-activity, and brilliance." (Molinary, 2013, pg. xvi)

A negative body image develops when someone feels her or his body does not measure up to family, social or media ideals. Many people feel as if they don't measure up – especially when they measure themselves against the standards of beauty commonly seen in the media. Individuals with a negative body image may often look in a mirror and see a distorted image. They may see parts of their body as smaller or larger from what they really are. Some emotions of individuals with a negative body image are feelings of self-consciousness, awkwardness, anxieties about their body and even shame. Individuals with a negative body image may even be convinced that only other people are attractive and that their body size or shape is a sign of personal failure. A negative body image can have a harmful effect on one's health and wellbeing.

Having a negative body image can affect one's mental state as well as physical health. Those individuals with a negative body image may experience anxiety,

depression, and low self-esteem. According to Molinary, a poor body image is not usually at the root of a woman's negative feelings about herself.   A poor self-concept and lack of confidence is often at the core of a negative body image. Self–acceptance is what most dynamically changes one's negative self-concept and body image (Molinary, 2010). As Planned Parenthood points out, a negative body image can take a toll on one's sexual health as well. In situations where girls are not comfortable with their sexuality, they may not feel confident and strong enough to make healthy sexual decisions. There are many serious side effects to a negative body image.

Literature Review

In the late 1990s, among the rising third wave of feminists, image and body were at the center of feminists' analysis. Amy Richards explains, "For many women, our bodies have become the canvasses upon which our struggles paint themselves. Body image, in fact, may be the pivotal third wave issue – the common struggle that mobilizes the current feminist issue" (Richards, 2003). Amy Richards goes on to explain that women who are tired of the pressure to act and look "perfect" tend to be present in this wave of feminism (Richards, 2003). Third wave feminists believed there needed to be further changes in stereotypes, media portals and language to define women. Our relationships with our bodies often signal how far we as feminists still have to go. It is evident not only in how we treat our bodies, but in how the expectations of our bodies continues to permeate our existence and dictate our lives.

Brumberg explains from the perspective of history, that adolescent self-consciousness is quite persistent, but its level is raised or lowered by cultural and social settings. Drawing on personal diaries, she tells the story of how American girls' relationship to their bodies has changed over the past century.

> Before World War I, girls rarely mentioned their bodies in terms of strategies for self-improvement or struggles for self-improvement or struggles for personal identity. Becoming a better person meant paying less attention to the self, giving more assistance to other and putting more effort into instructive reading or lessons at school. When girls in the nineteenth century thought about ways to improve themselves, they almost always focused on their internal character and how it was reflected in outward behavior. In 1892, the personal agenda of an adolescent diarist read: "resolved, not to talk about myself or feelings. To think before speaking. To work seriously. To be self-restrained in conversation and actions. Not to let my thoughts wander. To be dignified. Interest myself more in others.

Nearly a century later, by 1982, girls were writing about making themselves better, based on their external appearance. They talked about losing weight, getting contact lenses, buying clothes, make-up and accessories. Today, in the early twenty-first century, the body is something to be managed and maintained, usually though purchasing clothes, personal grooming items with a focus on the exterior surfaces. "In adolescent girls' private diaries and journals, the body is a consistent preoccupation, second only to peer relationships," explains Brumberg (Brumberg, 1997, pg. xxi).

Brumberg's biggest argument is based on the mismatch between girls' biology and today's culture. The process of sexual maturation is more difficult for girls today than it was a century ago. "Although sexual development – the onset of menstruation and the appearance of breasts – occurs in every generation, a girl's experience of these inevitable biological events is shaped by the world in which she lives, so much so, that

each generation, at its own point in history develops its own characteristic body

problems and projects," argues Brumberg (Brumberg, 1997, pg. xviii). Puberty begins

earlier and earlier today, which means that girls must cope with menstruation and other

aspects of physical maturation at a younger age, when they are really still children

emotionally.

Feminist scholar Susan Bordo analyzes a whole range of issues connected to the

body in a way that makes sense of our current social landscapes in her book,

Unbearable Weight (Bordo, 2003). Bordo expresses, "the body is the negative term, and

if woman *is* the body, then women *are* that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction

from knowledge, seduction away from god, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or

aggression, failure of will, even death" (pg. 5). The body from this negative lens serves

as a site of political struggle. Our culture has a huge impression on our bodies through

the practices and bodily habits of everyday life. "Taken together, the feminist critiques

of gendered representations and of the politics of the material body can also be seen as

an extended argument against the notion that the body is purely biological or natural

form" (Bordo, 2003, pg. 33). We speak of the body as we speak of reason or mind, as

though one model were equally and accurately descriptive of all human bodily

experiences.

Bordo displays the instrument and medium or power that is embedded in the

physical body. She explains that female bodies have historically been significantly more

vulnerable than male bodies to extremes in both forms of cultural manipulation of the

body. Bordo also explores the "feminist critiques of gendered representations and of

the politics of the material body can also be seen as an extended argument against the notion that the body is a purely biological or natural form" (pg. 33). She affirms, "the body has been forced to vacate its long-term residence on the nature side of the nature/culture duality and encouraged to take up residence, along with everything else that is human, within culture" (pg. 33). The body is referred to as an arena shaped by the social and economic organization of human life and often brutalized by it. "It has been amply documented that women in our culture are more tyrannized by the contemporary slenderness ideal than men are, as they typically have been by beauty ideals in general" (Bordo, 2003, pg. 204). We come to understand that the social manipulation of the female body emerged as a central strategy in the maintenance of power relations between the sexes over the past hundred years through male dominance.

The body, what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to it is a standard in Western culture. Molinary refers to the body as the vehicle in which we experience our life. The body, as anthropologist Mary Douglas has argued, is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body (Bordo, 2003). Bordo finds a clear contrast between two different symbolic functions of body shape and size. These differences are the designation of social position, such as class status or gender role and the outer indication of the spiritual, moral, or emotional state of the individual (pg. 187). It has been amply documented that women in our culture are more oppressed by the

contemporary slenderness ideal than men are, as they typically have been by beauty ideals in general. Popular culture does not apply any brakes to these fantasies of rearrangement and self-transformation. Rather, we are constantly told we can "choose" our own bodies. Bordo references Evian water with its claim of "the proper diet, the right amount of exercise and you can have, pretty much, any body you desire" (Bordo, 2003, pg. 247).

While popular culture suggests individuals can choose their body, *Body Outlaws: Rewriting the Rules of Beauty and Body Image* by Rebecca Walker (2003), allows readers to understand the struggle to claim one's shape, size, color and diversity. Walker raises the questions of "What compels us to even consider ads exhorting us to reshape, re-sculpt and remake aspects of ourselves that our parents made just fine in the first place?" (pg. xvi) She stresses that it's foolish to minimize the power of societal pressure that the models scream out in every newsstand and supermarket checkout line, and that we cannot ignore the self-esteem crisis permeating every facet of our culture. Walker believes that the hysteria to control and commodify an image of ideal beauty is overlooked and becoming a crisis of imaginations (Walker, 2003, pg. xvi). In a sense, the societal pressures to look and act a certain way have taken over. She argues that we discuss a lot about how the beauty standard needs to be changed, but we often forget to describe the personal and painstaking process it takes to make that change happen.

Walker also suggests that women's struggle with body image is about power. Body image goes far beyond weight, and it runs deeper than skin color. Our bodies have become arenas for feelings we don't deal with for unresolved traumas and injustices.

Our bodies and our convoluted relationships with them tell the real story. In a world that offers women challenges along with choices, compromise along with control, our bodies may seem the only realm where we can claim sovereignty. We start with what we can control: our bodies, our hair, our weight, our clothes, etc. When this control inevitably escapes us, our feelings of powerlessness solidify.

The beauty ideals that girls and women are faced with on a daily basis put great burden on them to look and act a particular way. "The feminine beauty ideal can be seen as a normative means of social control whereby social control is accomplished through the internalization of values and norms that serve to restrict women's lives" explains Bordo. "Beauty, or the pursuit of beauty, occupies a central role in many women's lives, especially relatively affluent Euro –American women who have the resources, time and energy to expend on acquired beauty." Bordo (2003) argues that the beauty regimes of diet, makeup, and dress are "central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women."

In *Still Failing at Fairness* (2009), Sadker and Zittleman write that "pretty is synonymous with thin" (Sadker and Zittleman, 2009, pg. 140). They provide their readers with astonishing statistics of body image related issues. In contrast to what Brumberg shares, they feel the obsession with thinness is a recent phenomenon and before the mass media existed, ideas of beauty were limited to an individual's own communications. They write, "most people did not even own mirrors. In earlier times a full figure was thought to be beautiful; ample breasts, belly, and buttocks signifies health and fertility" (pg. 141). With the drastic changes in technology, the media and

societal beliefs, the featured models in fashion and women's magazines have become thinner than ever and now weigh 23-25 percent less than the average women and maintain a weight 15-20 percent below what is considered healthy for her age and weight, write Sadker and Zittleman (pg. 141).

Sadker and Zittleman provide some background on the media, specifically with advertising companies. "Advertising companies spend over $200 billion a year teaching Americans what to value" (pg. 142). They sell images and concepts of success and worth, love and sexuality, popularity and normalcy. These ads teach us to live in pain because of who we are, versus who we should be. I believe this is a primary reason for why individuals conform to society and often feel pressured to look and act a certain way.

Sadker and Zittleman explore various studies and incorporate the powerful results for their readers. These findings include, "forty-four percent of adolescent girls admitted to reading diet articles, and consequences were staggering" (pg. 143). These results were from a study that involved 2,516 middle and high school students about the magazines they read and their dieting behaviors. Within five years the students that were surveyed were twice as likely to lose weight by skipping meals, fasting, or smoking cigarettes rather than girls who have never read such articles. Other alarming statistics include the fact that 90 percent of the estimated eleven million Americans struggling with anorexia and bulimia are women between the ages of twelve and twenty-five. In one classic study of hunger, the number one wish of girls eleven to seventeen years old is to lose weight. In support of this study, over 80% of ten year-old girls are afraid of

being fat, and by middle school, 40-70% of girls are dissatisfied with two or more parts

of their body. Sadker and Zittleman confirm that 'perfectionism, low self-esteem, and

negative body image can set the stage for depression." (pg. 145)

Conclusion

Individuals are constantly bombarded with messages by the media, society, their

peers, as well as countless other sources telling them that they aren't good enough,

smart enough, attractive enough, and certainly not thin enough. Body image is

something that affects all individuals and usually starts at a young age. One way or

another it is imperative that we, as a society, break down the beauty ideal standards

that are set out for all individuals, and specifically females. It is significant to intervene

and protect the children around us by promoting a healthy body image for them. As

President Barack Obama stated in his Presidential Proclamation about Child Health Day

in October of 2010, "Parents and other caregivers set an example of healthy living and

lay the foundation for our children's success. Whether providing nourishing meals,

attending regular checkups or encouraging outside activity, they teach the habits and

values for mental and physical well-being that last a lifetime." (Obama, 2010)

By looking at three kinds of interventions that address body image, I hope to

provide examples and models that – if instituted more broadly – could help adolescent

girls suffering from body image issues. The three interventions provide creative ways to

empower young women by enhancing their self-concept and guiding them towards self-

acceptance.

Chapter Two

Family Intervention: A Body Image Survival Guide

In this chapter I analyze *The Body Image Survival Guide for Parents* by Marci

Warhaft-Nadler (2013), a body image advocate. Warhaft-Nadler addresses body image

issues at all ages ranging from newborn to adolescents. Warhaft-Nadler provides

parents with insight and support to help understand and address their children's body

image concerns. It is important to realize the impact a family can have on adolescents'

body image.

The Role of Families

Children in their middle years typically treasure their families and feel they are

special and irreplaceable. Under ideal circumstances, families provide children with a

sense of belonging and a unique identity. Families are, or should, be a source of

emotional support and comfort, warmth and nurturing, protection and security.[3] Family

relationships provide children with a critical sense of being valued and with a vital

network of historical linkages and social support. Within every healthy family there is a

sense of exchange–a giving and taking of love and empathy by every family member.

Families are much more than groups of individuals. They are their own unit with

their own goals and aspirations. They also are a foundation where every child and adult

should feel that he or she is special and is encouraged to pursue his or her own dreams.

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[3] While families can be a huge support system, it's important to acknowledge that families in some cases can also be a source of violence and abuse. That is not, however, the focus of this thesis.

Families are a source where everyone's individuality is permitted to flourish. Although every family has conflicts, all family members should feel as though they can express themselves openly, share their feelings, and have their opinions listened to with understanding. In fact, conflicts and disagreements are a normal part of family life and are important insofar as they permit people to communicate their differences and express their feelings.

A family should instruct children and give guidance about personal values and social behavior. This can aid in instilling discipline and helping children learn and internalize codes of conduct that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. Promoting personal values at home, parents encourage their children to develop positive interpersonal relationships, and provide an environment that encourages learning both in the home and at school. This gives children a sense of history and a secure base from which to grow and develop. Yet, as important as these functions are, they do not happen automatically. Every parent knows it takes hard work to keep the family going as an effective, adaptive, and functional unit.

Family's Effect on Body Image

Every day children are inundated by endless messages intended to educate, entertain, or influence their behavior. With the media, peers and society bombarding children with countless messages that reinforce negative body image, parents can play a crucial role in shaping weight-related ideals to counteract these messages. However, they must start with themselves to encourage healthy perceptions, beliefs and actions

in their children (Warhaft-Nadler, 2013). It takes commitment and effort on the part of parents to monitor and help interpret these external influences on children.

Dissatisfaction with physical appearance is a growing trend among both men and women and is steadily affecting younger and younger people. Studies have noted the direct influence that parents' attitudes related to children's food intake have and how attempts to control food intake often have the opposite effects on a child's habits and choices (Brown and Ogden, 2004). Other research suggests that various aspects of family behavior related to food and weight are associated with increased rates of problematic eating in children (Kluck, 2010). Parents may knowingly or unwittingly influence their children from infancy when their body image ideals and eating – related believes may even affect their feeding practices (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleef-Dunn, 2002). A general tendency for a family to focus on appearance and attractiveness is related to greater difficulties with disordered eating and weight concerns among daughters.

Scholar Dara Chadwick analyzes the influence mothers and families have on young girls' bodies. Chadwick says, "moms definitely influence their daughters attitudes about their weight" (Chadwick, 2011, pg.1) In one study researchers concluded that more than half the women who struggle with their weight say family members pressured them to diet while growing up. "More than seventy percent of women who consider themselves overweight say their mother makes comments if they've gained or lost pounds" (Chadwick, 2011).

My focus group explored family influence on individual body image and my responders own perceptions and feelings of themselves. It's not surprising that all participants reported being influenced by their families or struggled with comparison of other family members. One individual reported her families' comments on her body to be negative however she internalizes it as her family supporting her to be healthier. In support of Chadwick, this individual remembers from a young age her mother telling her to eat healthier, and to exercise, specifically to do crunches in the living room while watching television. In more recent years, her mother has encouraged her to watch what she eats and not to eat too late at night because she has gained a few pounds and even went up a dress size.

Another focus group member believed her family was silently judging her because she weighed more than her older cousin, who was five years older. In addition, she disclosed her mother had recently lost weight and she felt pressured to make sure her mom did not get smaller than she was. She revealed that it's stressful for her to make sure she stays the same size and to make sure it does not become a competition between her and her mother.

Someone else expressed her family being very negative about her body structure. She revealed, her family members would tell her she was fat, she had rolls, she needed to stop eating, and that she didn't look good in certain clothes. This individual understands that her family wants her to be healthy however the negative from her family does make her self-conscious.

Chadwick and others encourage moms who want to set a positive body example for their daughters to nix negative comments about their own appearance. "Instead, make a point of letting your daughter hear you say something positive about yourself every day" (Chadwick, 2011). Overall, research has indicated that education is necessary for both parents and health professionals concerning the influence of both direct and indirect parent or weight-related attitudes and behaviors on a child's body satisfaction.

Since the beginning of the identification of eating disorders, researchers and clinicians have acknowledged that the family may play some role in the development and maintenance of dysfunctional body image and eating disturbance (Thompson; Smolak, 2009). In the late 1800s, a number of scholars suggested that anorexic clients and their families should be kept apart during treatment to allow the client to separate from her family and to protect the client from maladaptive family functioning that could exacerbate the eating disorder. In the 1970's, scholars continued to suggest that eating disorders were largely related to family functioning and that family therapy was an essential component in the treatment of eating disorders. Although cognitive-behavioral models that focus on the individual client have taken center stage more recently, there has continued to be acknowledgement of the role of the family in the development and maintenance of body image and eating disturbances (Thompson; Smolak, 2009).

Positive dialogue about the body is truly impactful. According to a survey conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute, five in ten girls believe their family influences the way they feel about their bodies. In fact, family was found to be more influential than the media. Unfortunately, positive body image communication is often

lacking. "In a 2008 survey by the Dove Self-Esteem Fund, a national partner of both Girls Incorporated and Girl Scouts of the USA, a top wish among all girls was for their families to communicate better with them, including more frequent and open conversations about what was happening in their own lives" (Van Dame, 2011). The Dove Self-Esteem project also reported "only 4% of women around the world consider themselves beautiful" (up from 2% in 2004).

As research has shown, families and loved ones wield a significant amount of influence on how we think and feel about our bodies. If we grew up surrounded by people who spent a lot of time focused on their bodies, criticizing others, or who were worried about eating and exercise, chances are that we will develop these same attitudes. We learn from other people about the things that are considered important, and if appearance is considered critical, then we're going to feel that spending lots of time and energy on image is the right thing to do. Within the family a discourse on weight operates as a "defining" mechanism for the construction of collective identity and it creates a common outlook about the inherent value of being thin. A majority of current research supports a familial component to the development of body image disturbance. In *The Etiology of Adolescents' Perceptions of Their Weight,* researchers reported from adolescents that family members were the primary source of weight control and appearance-related information (Desmond, Price, Gary, O'Connell, 1986).

It is possible that parents' attitudes and beliefs concerning eating, weight, and body shape directly influence their children's and adolescents' eating behaviors and body image concerns. The modeling and direct transmission of parents' attitudes and

beliefs about eating and weight can begin very early in a child's life. It has been shown

that children as young as five years old are influenced by their parents' attitudes toward

eating and weight. Also, mothers who were involved actively in dieting were more likely

to have daughters who had strong ideas about dieting. Additional support for the

modeling theory is mothers of daughters with disordered eating exhibited greater

eating disturbance, had a longer history of dieting, and thought their daughters should

lose more weight (Thompson; Smolak, 2009). Levels of dietary restraint and body image

disturbance were also found to correspond significantly for mothers and their older

adolescent daughters.

In some circumstances, mothers may not model dysfunctional eating behaviors

but they may directly communicate their beliefs about weight, dieting, and exercise,

which are then internalized by their daughters. In other cases, family preoccupation

with eating and body shape has a direct effect on female adolescents' degree of body

dissatisfaction and eating symptoms. Family preoccupation also indirectly influences

eating disturbance, negative self-esteem, and psychiatric symptoms (Thompson;

Smolak, 2009).

Other research has been done to examine the nature of teasing behavior by

peers in school. Teasing has been defined as "a personal communication, directed by an

agent toward a target, that includes three components: aggression, humor, and

ambiguity" (Thomson; Smolak, 2009). Cash (1995) reported that seventy two percent of

all college women recalled being teased as children usually with respect to their facial or

body weight and shape. Also, appearance-related teasing was negatively correlated with

women's current body satisfaction, social comparisons with siblings were correlated with current body image perceptions, and women's perceptions of their mothers' body image concerns were related to current body and weight concerns. A participant of my focus group reported being influenced by the comments her parents made toward her sister's weight. Being that her sister was overweight and being pressured to lose weight by her parents made this participant aware of the negativity from her family and influenced her to make sure she was never overweight. Another member, described her younger sister as being a twig, however she never took it personally or thought of it as something negative. "I never saw it as a negative thing per say because of my Filipino culture and the fact that we eat a lot."

"In addition, negative verbal commentary was revealed as a mediator in the relationship between level of obesity and body image disturbance. More specifically, overweight status appeared to be a risk factor for teasing, but overweight status did not appear to exert a direct influence on body dissatisfaction." (Thomson; Smolak, 2009) Findings suggest that an interactive relationship between a dispositional factor (obesity) and a sociocultural factor (teasing) both appear to have an influence on the development of body image disturbance.

There is evidence that family race and ethnicity, in addition to the family's cultural orientation, may be related to body image and eating disorder concerns. Specifically, families with greater cultural orientation toward White, middle-class values tended to have children and adolescents who were at greater risk for eating disturbances. In addition, lower family connectedness was associated with binge eating;

more so in Caucasian American adolescents than in other racial and ethnic groups. It has also been noted that adolescent girls whose parents misused alcohol showed significantly higher rates of eating disordered symptoms when compared with adolescent girls whose parents did not misuse alcohol.

A few focus group participants made correlations between their body image and their cultures. One in particular disclosed being anorexic at a young age and being extremely underweight. She explained that her family couldn't understand why she didn't want to eat. This young girl grew up in a Haitian household where her family believed food fixed everything. Initially, her family didn't think anything was wrong, they just presumed she wasn't hungry. This participant explained her family had to find a constructive way to figure out why she wasn't eating because they always assumed food was the answer to everything.

Another member believed a person's Body Mass Index (BMI) varies depending on their culture. "Someone who may be from a West Indian or Caribbean culture may eat more meat and be thicker due to the foods they eat. It varies for each culture based on what they eat. Some cultures may eat hardier meals where as others eat very small proportions and this can alter one's BMI".

Generally, it is likely that teasing, or negative verbal commentary, especially within the family context, has a strong influence on the development of body image disturbance and eating problems. The relationship between parents' attitudes and beliefs concerning weight, eating, body shape and the development of body image concerns as well as eating disturbance has been well established.

A Family Guide to Body Image

The Body Image Survival Guide For Parents was written in an effort to help parents promote a healthy and positive body image for their children. Warhaft-Nadler (2013) tackles the tough questions that children and parents are faced with when negotiating aspects of body image and self-esteem.

In a societal context where body obsessions coincide with alarming rates of obesity among Western children, *The Body Image Survival Guide for Parents* is a useful guidebook that is meant to educate parents on body image. It may be astounding to learn that body image issues can begin as young as the toddler years and can continue through the teenage years and beyond. While girls are often the focus of eating disorders, the author, a parent of sons, dismisses that myth quickly, saying that the self-esteem issues underlying body image extend to boys as well. Early chapters are broken down by age range, and then later by issues that could arise within every age range. Included is advice to parents about how to handle their own weight issues, their child's weight issues, and sections about outside influences, such as school and media.

Currently Warhaft-Nadler is a body image advocate and founder of the "Fit versus Fiction" project. She leads workshops for children to help them eradicate negative body images and boost confidence, as she shows in her book that body image and self-esteem are inextricably linked. These workshops are held at schools, where she discusses misinformation and inaccurate messages that young children are constantly bombarded with. This program sets out to help young individuals who are turning to the media to help identify themselves and are usually left feeling inadequate due to the

unrealistic models and images. Warhaft-Nadler's "Fit versus Fiction" posters incorporate

overwhelming facts about young children's body image concerns. Below are images

from her "Fit versus Fiction" project:

Warhaft-Nadler includes a reference guide linking to Internet publications and websites that promote positive body images. Perhaps the most gratifying part of the book is the collection of "Proud to be me" comments from real children ranging in age from four to sixteen: "I'm cool because I'm strong and nice," "I like myself because I am helpful to other people and very fun," and "I know I'm healthy and great just the way I am and I don't care what anybody else thinks."

Warhaft-Nadler titles chapter three, *Ages 9-12: Do These Hormones Make Me Look Fat?* She includes quotes from young girls such as, "A few girls in my class wear bras already, but they have nothing to wear them for. I ask them why they wear it and they say it's because they want to look more attractive for boys. It made me feel like I had to wear one too, but I really didn't want to (age ten) and "My best friend started to develop way before me. She has a pretty big chest and I'm really small. Sometimes I wish that I looked like her, but then she tells me that I'm so lucky that I'm small and the boys don't pick on me and try to grab me"(age thirteen). Unfortunately, these are real scenarios that take place all the time.

Warhaft-Nadler uses her friend's experience with her nine-year old daughter as a prime example for this chapter. This young girl shouted to her mother, "I don't want to grow up!" When her mother asked why, the young girl answered, "I don't want to grow up because grownups are FAT and I don't want to be fat!" For Warhaft-Nadler, it was easy to figure out where the fear of this young girl was coming from. She comes from a long line of yo-yo dieters and "fat talk" is a commonplace in her household. Warhaft-Nadler explains, "by seeing adults in her life focus on body shape and weight, she's

started to develop an unhealthy relationship with food and her body. Sadly this isn't

unusual, especially at her age" (pg. 25).

The author goes on to explain that the "tween" years are tough and not just for

the children experiencing them but also for their parents, who are struggling to find

ways to make things a little easier for them. "Not only are kids this age still dealing with

the same pressures from the media, society and peers that have surrounded them up to

this point, but now they've got the added stress that comes from homework, possible

transition to middle school, exposure to risky behaviors, and, probably the scariest

challenge of all, PUBERTY!" (Warhaft-Nadler, 2013, pg. 25). As Brumberg explains,

puberty begins earlier today, which means that girls must cope with menstruation and

other aspects of physical maturation at a younger age, when they are really still children

emotionally. "Until puberty, girls really are the stronger sex in terms of standard

measures of physical and mental health: they are hardier, less likely to injure

themselves, and more competent in social relations. But as soon as the body begins to

change, a girl's advantage starts to evaporate" (Brumberg, 1997, pg. xxiii). At this point,

more and more girls are beginning to suffer from clinical depression. The explanation of

this sex difference lies in the frustrations girls feel about the divergence between their

dreams for the future and the conventional sex roles implied by their emerging breasts

and hips.

Warhaft-Nadler clarifies that puberty in the U.S. generally occurs between the

ages of eight and thirteen, but could start sooner or end later. It's essentially the time

when a young girl's body prepares itself for womanhood. While many classrooms

discuss most of the changes that children go through during this time, one area that is definitely not discussed enough is puberty-related weight gain. Weight gain during this time is not only to be expected, but is also a necessary part of the growth process and the last thing we want to do is impede that process in any way. Girls should expect to gain weight, especially around their hips and breasts, and often under their arms, upper back, and waists but too many of them panic at the first sign of their clothes fitting tighter.

Warhaft-Nadler writes about comforting a mother of a twelve-year-old girl who was concerned about some weight gain around her daughter's stomach despite the fact that her daughter was very active and a healthy eater. Warhaft-Nadler reassures this troubled mother, that what was happening to her daughter was completely healthy and the worst thing she could do is to say anything to her daughter that would make her self-conscious about her weight. "You do not, I repeat, do not want to put your children on any kind of diet while their bodies are doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing, or it could result in a skewed metabolism resulting in a life filled with weight and body image issues. However, it's the perfect time to talk about healthy lifestyle choices" (Warhaft-Nadler, 2013, pg. 26).

Warhaft-Nadler also assists another mother in explaining puberty to her daughter in a way that will make sense. She trains this mother by telling her that children want the truth, plain and simple, short and sweet. She provides an explanation that begins with puberty starting in the brain and ends with the ovaries producing a hormone called estrogen, which is responsible for preparing your body for womanhood

and having children. Warhaft-Nadler suggests, "make it a point of reassuring your daughter that this may be a bit of an awkward time when her body seems to have a mind of its own, and some body parts may be growing faster than others. However things will settle down" (pg. 27). The best thing a young girl can do during this phase is to live a healthy lifestyle, complete with nutritious food and plenty of physical activity.

Also included in this chapter are tips on *how to deal with the tween years, fears, and occasional tears*. First and foremost, the conversation should never be about weight, but instead should focus on health. "Talk about all the work her body's doing and how important it is to fuel it with a variety of high quality foods that will help it grow in the strongest, healthiest way possible" (Warhaft-Nadler, 2013, pg. 27). It is important to explain to a young girl that her bones and muscles need physical activity to function properly. Puberty is a very emotional time, and parents should try to avoid making emotional connections with food for as long as possible. Growing kids are hungry kids, and by making healthier options easily accessible, parents can help avoid them filling up on empty calories. "The easiest thing you can do is keep a bowl of fresh, washed fruit in a bowl on the kitchen table or counter so they can see it when they walk in the room" (pg. 27). The more important tip she provides is that during this time of changes, when there is so much focus on what girls' bodies look like, it's important to make sure you compliment teens on their actions instead of their looks. "Let them know how proud you are of them and how interesting, funny, intelligent, and fun to be with they are. Make sure they hear you complimenting other people on actions instead of their looks as well this will remind them that what they do is far more important than

how they look" (pg. 27). The last suggestion Warhaft-Nadler provides is for mothers to

look through some old photos and find some of themselves during this time so their

daughters can see the changes they went through.

Another valuable thing Warhaft-Nadler covers is the *Sticky Question: Why am I*

going through puberty before/after my friends are? Warhaft-Nadler suggests this

answer:

Everybody goes through puberty and will experience the same changes, but will do it at
their own pace. Some kids may start sooner and may start later, but everyone catches up
at the end. There is absolutely no reason to feel embarrassed during this time. It's all a
part of growing up strong and healthy. The important message here is that puberty is not
something negative to be feared but something positive to be celebrated.

By celebrating puberty, it can bring a positive light to one of the hardest times of being a
child.

Another great point that she brings up later in the book is how after school

activities can become invaluable in building the self-esteem of adolescent girls. Warhaft-

Nadler claims the list of benefits related to children engaging in extracurricular activities

to be an important list. It includes self-confidence, support, responsibility and

contribution. There is something incredibly empowering about finding something that

you love to do and discovering that you're good at it. Encouraging children to try out all

kinds of activities until they find something that they truly enjoy doing can really bring

out self-confidence in them. There are endless activities for children to get involved in

and part of the fun is finding out which ones they're best suited for. (Warhaft-Nadler,

2013) It's important for parents to not choose the activity for them, but to help children

and adolescents pick those that provide them the most joy. "The feeling of pride that

comes from excelling at something you enjoy is hugely fulfilling and necessary when

building positive self-esteem. Believe it or not, we don't even have to be good at something to gain self-esteem from it, since sometimes the pride simply comes from being able to try something new and unfamiliar" (Warhaft-Nadler, 2013).

Children need to learn how to value and appreciate themselves without looking for constant validation from their peers. Being involved in out of school activities can be a great way to do that. Having friends outside of school gives children an extra source of support when they need it. According to Warhaft–Nadler, studies show that kids who participate in sports find it easier to resist peer pressure when it comes to engaging in dangerous behaviors involving things like drugs and alcohol. Giving children somewhere safe to be, with people who have similar interests and goals can help guide them and keep them moving in a positive direction. Responsibility and contribution come into effect when young people feel part of a team. Children learn very quickly that they're not only responsible for themselves but also the other players, which is a great way to teach the concept of being just one part of a bigger picture. Learning responsibility at a young age can help children be better prepared for school and even their careers, as they get older. Some children excel at team sports, and others prefer individual activities; the key to building confidence through activity is to help children find whatever it is that they like to do and then support them in continuing to do it. Extracurricular activities can motivate, inspire and strengthen the self-esteem of any child, from artist to athlete and everything in between.

Children who are given ample opportunity to play, learn, and create in a nurturing environment alongside their peers will grow up understanding confidence,

courage, and determination and will be able to use these character traits for the rest of their lives. Warhaft-Nadler provides five questions parents should ask their children's coach, instructor or group leader. They include, how important is winning to you; what will my child learn from this experience; if I have any questions or concerns, what is the best way for me to reach you, what type of supervision is provided; and how can I help? A truly successful child is one who has all of the people around them working together to be supportive and encouraging.

Overall this book provides parents with specific, practical ways to combat the body pressures that their children face in today's culture. The scenario based question and answer format is valuable for parents with children at all stages of their development. It also provides answers to real life questions. As a reader I appreciated that fact that Warhaft-Nadler discussed body image issue pertaining to males as well as females.

Adults can help children build healthy self-esteems that trump gender-restrictive stereotypes and messages. Adults have some homework to do. They have already been manipulated and shaped by society's traditional view of gender roles. It will take a constant effort to make a difference. Teachers and parents should monitor and eliminate sexist terms and comments. Instead of focusing on girls' and boys' physical attributes adults could emphasize more important issues such as character, caring and compassion.

As *The Body Image Survival Guide for Parents* points out, modeling nonsexist behaviors can broaden the views of children. Fathers who cook, mothers who know how

to use technology, and parents who share home chores are sending important messages to their children. A teacher who asks a girl to work the audiovisual equipment or set up a lab experiment, while asking a boy to take attendance or help in the school's day-care-center is also sending messages that deconstruct gender stereotypes. Complimenting children doing things well can play a big role in promoting a healthy body image for them. Whether it is schoolwork, helping a friend or being responsible, it's imperative to recognize positive efforts and build self-esteem. Encouraging girls and boys to explore nonsexist interests and toys is significant to their self-esteem. A chemistry kit for a girl and a kitchen for a boy broaden many options.

Letting girls do things on their own and not providing them a shortcut based on their gender can continue to promote a healthy self-esteem. For example, when a girl is old enough to drive, she is also old enough to change a tire. Allowing her to change the tire can build self-esteem, confidence, and independence rather than watching a parent do it (Sadker; Zittleman, 2009). Parents monitoring their children's friends can be important because peer groups can be quite influential. Aggressive friends of either gender can be a source of problematic behavior. Girls' involvement in sports and physical activity has positive health effects. Research has shown that female athletes do better academically, have lower school dropout rates, lower levels of stress and depression, and develop a sense of competence that builds self-esteem. It is important to give children the freedom to experiment, and eliminate the fear of failure. A sense of security at school and at home can go a long way in building self-esteem.

People are often unaware of the impact of their behavior, particularly when it involves giving feedback on physical appearance. What a parent may consider harmless teasing, for example, a daughter may consider highly critical and damaging to her confidence about her appearance. Therefore, it may be helpful to have all family members and significant others involved in both the assessment and treatment of body image – related problems, so that discrepancies between what family members think they are doing and saying and what others perceive can be illustrated. Particularly with children, it may be helpful to have siblings and parents made aware of the impact of their behaviors on the child. Certainly, parents can help their children learn that many types of appearance –related feedback are inappropriate and hurtful by both modeling appropriate behavior and discouraging children from using appearance – related comments in relation to others. Educating parents through valuable books like Warhart-Nadler's is the kind of family intervention that can address the epidemic of negative body images among adolescent girls in our country.

Conclusion

Body image researchers have emphasized sociocultural factors, particularly peer, parent and media influences as possible contributors to the development of body dissatisfaction. Not surprisingly, there is more evidence for girls than for boys, and there is more research concerning wanting to be thinner than wanting to be more muscular.

Parents generally like the way their young children look, though they become more dissatisfied as the children get older. As I have reported through my focus group

on positive body image interventions, a family member one way or another affected all participants' body image. Most students felt the negative comments were meant to be negative but were said with good intentions of healthy concerns. Half of the participants revealed being pressured about weighing more than older siblings, cousins and even parents. Two thirds of the participants related their culture and family values to their body image and experience with their families in relation to their bodies. Over all family seems to have a significant impact on all members of the focus group.

Appearance related teasing is the most common form of teasing among children. Indeed, girls may routinely engage in "fat talk" disapproving their normal weight bodies for the purpose of fitting in socially. It is imperative that parents acknowledge the instinctive role they take on in their child's life. Parents must continue to listen to their children, provide constructive criticism, open lines of communication, encourage independence and creativity and lastly, be a good role model.

A book like T*he Body Image Survival Guide For Parents* is an effective intervention in girls' negative body image because it provides great examples on how to handle these everyday situations with hands on tips and activities with real questions and answers. Warhaft-Nadler (2013) helps parents understand the challenges their children are facing and teaches them the tools they need to empower their children to tune out the negative messages and focus on their strengths.

In the next chapter I will turn to a second intervention for promoting a positive body image. The next intervention is based on an individual effort with the use of a self-

help book, *Beautiful You*. It is a journey of self-enhanced practices to inspire women's

self-concept and self-acceptance, which I read with a feminist's lens.

Chapter Three

Self Help Intervention: Journey to a Beautiful You

As I have demonstrated, puberty presents unique body–related challenges for

girls, which boys do not encounter. Girls' bodies change physically in a manner that is

not reinforced by prevailing cultural standards, particularly the preference for a thin

non-curvaceous shape. Boys however, live in a society that values a large and muscular

physique in men; therefore, the natural physical changes that occur during this period

for boys are supported by current values. It is thought that these factors, at least

partially, may account for the more negative view of puberty by girls and the decrease

in self-esteem that occurs for them at this time. "The different aspects of puberty

change may also be associated with different body image effects, for instance, breast

development may be connected with an enhancement of self-esteem and body

satisfaction" (Slap, Khalid, Paikoff, Brooks-Gunn & Warren, 1994).

The issue of puberty change is critical for girls because puberty is happening

much earlier in life today than in the past. As historian Brumberg writes, "puberty

begins earlier and earlier today, which means that girls must cope with menstruation

and other aspects of physical maturation at a younger age, when they are really still

children emotionally." (Brumberg, 1997) According to Brumberg, "Until puberty, girls

really are the stronger sex in terms of standard measures to physical and mental health:

they are hardier, less likely to injure themselves, and more competent in social

relations." Brumberg states, as soon as the body begins to change, a girl's advantage

starts to evaporate. At this point, more and more girls begin to suffer from spells of

clinical depression. The explanation of this sex difference lies in the frustrations girls feel about the divergence between their dreams for the future and the conventional sex roles implied by their emerging breasts and hips. Not only do girls have an increased risk of depression, they are also more vulnerable to eating disorders, substance abuse and dropping out of school (Brumberg, 1997).

Society tells us that girls should expect their breasts to grow while boys expect to become more muscular (kidshealth.org, 2014). The body often goes through other changes before, during and after puberty and sometimes these changes can be very different from our expectations. Both girls and boys may notice themselves growing in unfamiliar places or they may grow taller and thinner. Some individuals eat healthy foods and exercise but still gain weight while others eat everything in sight and still stay thin. Eventually it all balances out and most people adjust to how their body moves and works, however it can take some time to adjust. What happens to people physically during puberty can influence how they feel about their bodies and themselves.

We become more aware of physical attractiveness right around the time our bodies begin to change. This can make physical changes difficult to deal with emotionally. *TeensHealth* (2014) reports that adjusting to a changing body is more than just looks. Lots of teens base their self-image on how their bodies feel and perform. Changes in our body's appearance and performance are all perfectly normal parts of growing up (TeensHealth, 2014). In the next sections of this chapter I will explore emotional eating, body image, and the ways that self-help books might intervene in the

challenges adolescent girls face in puberty. I will do a close reading of one particular

text, *Beautiful You: A Daily Guide to Radical Self-Acceptance* (2010) by Rosie Molinary.

Emotional Eating

According to kidshealth.org, emotional eating is when people use food as a way

to deal with feelings instead of to satisfy hunger (2014). Emotional eating can affect

weight, health and overall well-being. Not many of us make the connection between

eating and our feelings. But understanding what drives emotional eating can help

people take steps in changing it. The real trouble with emotional eating is that once the

pleasure of eating is gone the feelings that caused emotional eating remains. Individuals

may often feel worse about eating the amount they did after the fact. One of the

biggest myths about emotional eating is that it is always prompted by negative feelings.

Most of the time individuals turn to food when they are stressed out, lonely, sad,

anxious, or bored, however emotional eating can be caused from positive feelings as

well. For example, the romance and community one gets from sharing dessert or

celebrations and holiday feasts are positive feelings. More often, emotional eating is a

way to seek comfort or a distraction from the true feelings.

Emotional eating patterns are usually learned as children. For example, children

will learn this by receiving candy after a big achievement or cookies when they are upset

or crying. These patterns stay with them throughout their lifetimes. The first step in

unlearning these patterns is awareness. Managing emotional eating means finding other

ways to cope with the situations and feelings that make individuals turn to food.

Adolescent girls today face the issues girls have always faced – "Who am I? Who do I want to be?"- but their answers, more than ever before, revolve around the body. Body image expert and professional speaker Robyn Silverman writes:

> Constant evaluations of parts like breasts, thighs and legs are common. Women aren't just objectified, they are dissected and criticized. These body shaming messages tell people that body parts are more important than the whole person, you are only as good as the sum of your parts and no matter what you look like you will be critiqued. It's no wonder that many women develop scripts inside their heads that tell them they are not good enough as they are and no matter what, they never will be. (pg. 1)

Self-Help Books

So-called "self-help" books, which are widely sold in developed countries like the United States, contain advice for how to live a happier life. For many years individuals have sought guidance in religion and philosophy, for how to live their lives but today individuals often seek advice from psychology. This kind of help is typically focused on specific psychological problems or choices in life. Self-help books popularize insights from psychological science and draw in particular on positive psychology (Bergsma, 2007). As scholar Ad Bergsma writes, "an analysis of 57 best-selling psychology books makes it clear that the primary aim is not to alleviate the symptoms of psychological disorders, but to enhance personal strengths and functioning" (Bergsma, 2007). The term "self-help" has been used in the publishing industry to refer to a wide variety of advice books, from diet and financial success to love relationships and the pursuit of peace and happiness (Ringer, 2013). However, what exactly is self-help and does it really work? According to Ringer, self-help is about learning, or figuring out, how to help oneself, which unfortunately, goes against the grain of today's culture of dependency.

Ringer points out that some people are not as independently action-oriented as others, which is why really good self-help material can be invaluable"). Its one thing to read and teach yourself the concepts of a self-help book but it's another thing to take the actions required to make a personal change. "The reason some people benefit from self-help advice and others do not is usually because those that benefit are ready to receive the information that can help them make major changes in their lives, while those that do not benefit are usually not ready," explained Ringer (pg. 1).

Self-help activities are firmly established in contemporary American society (Chaplin, 1989; Starker, 1989). Whether one joins a group, reads a book, watches a videotape, listens to an audiotape, or interacts with a computer, an overabundance of self-help opportunities exist. According to Ad Bergsma, self-help is defined as "the act of helping or bettering oneself without the aid of others." In the context of psychology books, self-help is a form of coping with one's personal or emotional problems without professional help. Therefore, all books that can serve this practical aim are considered self-help books (Bergsma, 2007).

Self-help books alone are a multimillion-dollar publishing phenomenon (Shapiro, 1987). According to Bergsma, "the self-help industry is a goldmine." In fact, Americans spent $563 million on self-help books in 2000 (Paul, 2001). Starker believes self-help is an essential part of American culture. Starker ties a connection between self-help books and the Declaration of Independence.

> Self-help books started more than 200 years ago with a new conception of society based on what Jefferson called the individual 'pursuit of happiness' in the Declaration of Independence. The ridgid, fixed-class systems of European countries were replaced by an open system in which 'a man could hope to rise in

station according to his merits and abilities, and to be judged solely on the basis of his individual accomplishments'. Obstacles to upward social mobility were removed and people felt that they also could be part of the American dream, if only they knew how. Self-help books offered appropriate guidance. (pg. 342)

The self-help industry is important to therapists and can have a profoundly beneficial or detrimental influence on the therapeutic process. Therapists can use self-help books to educate clients on specific issues. However if books are inaccurate, fail to separate an author's opinion from research findings, and/or contain suggestions or interventions that fail to recognize gender and diversity issues, self –help books can be detrimental a to client's change process (Zimmerman, Holm, Starrels, 2001). A study that investigated self-help books from a feminist perspective found that many therapists frequently assign self-help books as part of their therapeutic plan (Zimmerman, Holm, Starrels, 2001). This study involved 105 psychologists; 89 percent reported that they regularly assigned self-help books as part of therapy (Zimmerman, Holm, Starrels, 2001). "In many cases, the popularity of self-help books makes the authors' messages or guidance seem important, right, or truthful, regardless of its accuracy. To use self-help books more effectively, therapists must critically analyze them to determine their appropriateness for inclusion in the therapeutic process" (Zimmerman, Holm, Starrels, 2001). In summary, this study found that the number of feminist books, the number of non-feminist books, and those that fell in the middle were about equal across the four components of feminist family therapy. It also found the top selling books are more likely to be non-feminist than feminist and that the best-selling self-help books appear to have become less feminist over time (Zimmerman, Holm, Starrels, 2001). It is essential to remember that "self-help" books must be used with care.

Publishers have found that, just as women are more likely than men to seek counseling and therapy, women are the primary consumers of self-help books and have a positive attitude towards them (Shapiro, 1987). Thus, many books are directed at women, particularly at how women handle their relationships with men. Yet self-help books have been criticized for victim blaming and reinforcing unproductive gender role stereotypes (Schilling & Fuehrer, 1987; Walker, 1988). This raises a concern about the value of self-help books for female readers in particular. Self–help books may not be the primary source for making a life change but depending on their quality and approach, they may serve as helpful additional resources for young women to turn to, and as I argue in this chapter, may provide a valuable intervention in body image dissatisfaction. Some of them utilize tools often applied in the feminism classroom, as I will discuss further.

There is no reason to think that individuals who buy self-help books are chronically unhappy or mentally disturbed. As Bergsma writes, "Self-help readers tend to have an ability to recognize relationships between thoughts, feelings and actions and want to use self-help books to improve themselves. Reading self-help books seems to be part of an active and adequate coping style, which fits in with an individualistic culture, where individuals have the freedom to pursue happiness on their own ground" (Bergsma, 2007, 347).

Ringer points out that the key to benefiting from self-help books is for individuals to understand that it is their responsibility to actually do the work that leads to improvement in one area or another of their lives (Ringer, 2013, pg.1). "For example, a

book on good nutrition and healthy eating habits may give you a great deal of

information about foods that will improve your health and foods that are likely to be

harmful to you. But it's your responsibility to follow through and, assuming you have

faith in the author's suggestions, employ the self-discipline to develop healthy eating

habits" explains Ringer. (2) Ringer points out that if self-help is about learning or figuring

out how to help oneself, then, it is certainly possible to help oneself without reading

anything at all. "In fact, that's precisely what you do every time you learn through

experience. But some people are not as independently action-oriented as others, which

is why really good self-help material can be invaluable," justifies Ringer (pg. 1).

In the next section I analyze *Beautiful You: A Daily Guide to Radical Self-Acceptance* (2010), a thought provoking and insightful book by Rosie Molinary which

aims to change the self-confidence and self-understanding of adolescent girls. This self-

help book draws on self-awareness, creativity and mind-body connections. *Beautiful You*

incorporates practical techniques into a 365 day action plan that empowers women to

regain a healthy self-image, improve self-confidence, reframe and break undermining

habits of self-criticism, and champion their own emotional and physical wellbeing. I

chose this specific self-help book to analyze in this thesis because Molinary does an

excellent job in her text of working to liberate young females, through a variety of

practices, which I believe could serve as helpful interventions in the body image issues I

explore.

Beautiful You

 Beautiful You is a daily guide to what Molinary calls "Radical Self-Acceptance." "Radical Self-Acceptance" can be defined as taking complete control and accepting the realities of oneself. This book is written specifically for females to improve their self-confidence or image. Molinary advocates the significance of knowing one's self worth and wisdom. This book draws on self-awareness, creativity and mind-body connections.

 Molinary expresses, "I know what it is like to want to believe in yourself wholeheartedly only to have episodes in your life lead you to question your own beauty and radiance. I know what it is like to try to help someone galvanize her own power, realize her own brilliance" (Molinary, 2010). Stimulating one's power and brilliance is just what Molinary hopes for when encountering females on a daily basis and also what is being offered in her book, *Beautiful You: A Daily Guide to Radical Self-Acceptance.*

 In this book, readers will find down to earth advice on how they can realize their own "brilliance" every day, which Molinary interprets as females' understanding their self-worth, value, talent and wisdom. The true value of the book comes from doing the work, from journeying toward insight and action through the exercises and reflections. This book is a tool kit for self- awareness, positive self – esteem, and a healthy body image. Molinary writes, "the magic of this book begins with your intention – your desire to tackle what is limiting you, and your decision to love yourself, be happy, and feel satisfied with your body" (pg. xv).

 Like the researchers cited earlier in this thesis, Molinary argues that "a poor self-concept and lack of confidence are often at the core of a negative body image" (pg. xv).

Molinary believes that self-acceptance is what most dynamically changes one's negative

self-concept and body image. Molinary stresses that individuals can only find self-

acceptance through the hard but meaningful work of assessing where they are, seeing

where they have been, and planning where they are going, while enhancing their life

along the way.

Beautiful You takes readers on a journey that encourages them to develop a

clearer sense of themselves. Once an individual has a clearer sense of self, self-

confidence will become a habit. "Confidence is born proof and proof of your worth

comes when you have cultivated and embraced your whole self" (Molinary, 2010). As

Molinary explains, positive self-esteem comes with knowing your truth, your reality and

arriving at a self-mastery that allows for resilience, pro-activity, and brilliance (Molinary,

2010). This book's journey may take readers more deeply inward however in the end it

will help them move beyond themselves and into the world, where acting on what they

have to offer does much more good than worrying about what they look like.

> The secret to success with Beautiful You is completing its guided daily practices.
> Daily practices yield new patterns of thinking, and those patterns ultimately yield
> new habits that will renew your sense of self in a positive, dynamic, healthy way.
> This book quiets you and moves you to find clarity; it encourages you to develop
> your own insights through compassionate observation and careful execution.
> This a book that will leave you unsettled at times, so that you can eventually
> become more settled in life; a book that challenges you at times, so that you can
> develop a fresh outlook. By giving you the opportunity to consider, observe, do
> and be, this book will help you recognize what is really beautiful – you, as you
> are. (pg. xvi)

We can all grow, no matter our history. We can all recognize our intelligence and

capabilities. Recognizing beauty, as it turns out is a choice. You can see beauty the way

the world hands it to you or you can see beauty the way you want to see it.

Molinary provides an extensive overview on how to use this book and she encourages readers to use it in a way that makes most sense to them. Some individuals will start from Day 1 and read the chapters in order to Day 365. Others may refer to the Table of Contents and jump to those topics that pertain to them. No matter which way it is done, Molinary promises the journey will be rich, and it will lead readers to find something very important: themselves. Readers may even choose a specific time of day in which they read each passage. This can be done in the morning over tea or coffee or at night before bedtime. If the task involves a journal exercise or other reflection, it can be done right then and there. If it requires some sort of action or to step out into the world, it can be planned for the next upcoming day.

Molinary continues to explain, "this book was written as a guide to an individual's journey, but by no means do you need to take the journey alone" (pg. xviii). She clarifies that doing this journey through a partnership with someone else or in a group may even push individuals to deeply engage in the process more than doing it on their own. The author provides tips and insight on how to facilitate the process in a group or partnership. The biggest goal in this process is always to grow and move forward. "We will support another in this process and push one another to recognize, celebrate and offer her brilliance to the world" describes Molinary. Molinary also gives the idea of having mothers go through this process with their daughters as another option.

Molinary writes that what she wants for each and every one of her readers is to learn the ability to experience the world as they see it themselves, not as how others

see them or how they perceive they are seen; the ability to live now rather than someday. She wants readers to understand that a negative self-image is a beacon, calling us to explore what is really going on deep within and to use that beacon to arrive at a place of understanding and clarity. Molinary wants her readers to break free from the idea that narrowly defined external beauty is everything, and instead embrace and see the beauty within their inner selves.

In the next section I will analyze *Beautiful You* and view some of the daily practices which Molinary encourages young women to complete in order to embrace their inner beauty. This paper does not allow enough time to look at all 365 daily practices, however I will look at ten daily practices and analyze their effectiveness as part of a valuable body image intervention. This will offer a sense of the structure of the book and level of empowerment in which Molinary is instilling in her readers. In this case, rather than blaming the victim or perpetuating gender stereotypes, *Beautiful You* demonstrates the positive potential of self-help books, and helps us understand their commercial success in the publishing industry. She does a great job in providing daily practices that empower young women to feel worthy about themselves.

Beautiful You Journey

Day1- Begin:

Molinary begins Day one daily practice by revealing her experience with journaling and how it gave her an opportunity to get to know herself a young. She explains that teens live on the surface of todays fast pace society while never looking

into the depths of themselves. Individuals are too busy to listen to themselves or to

really get to know themselves and their stories or voices. Molinary used journaling as an

entryway and silence; a way to slow down. She goes on to further explain there is now

one particular way to journal; there is only the desire to record thoughts and feelings to

grapple with a better sense of self. With this first daily practice, Molinary challenges her

readers to look deep within themselves and figure out what their hopes are in regards

to beauty perceptions and body image and how to start living those hopes.

Molinary expresses the importance and significance of outcomes with journaling.

The concept of journaling can have a positive influence on an individual's body image

due to the many goals and effects that are formed from this feminist pedagogical[4]

approach. Some of these methods include providing a safe space for individuals,

allowing them to come to voice, and showing an ethic of care in all aspects of their

mind, body and soul. Bell Hooks (1994) shares her passion in *Teaching to Transgress*,

where she interrogates the mind/body split that is usually taken for granted. Hooks

communicates the value of respecting and caring for the souls of individuals, as it is

essential for the critical conditions of where learning can deeply take place. She

expresses the role of an educator is not only to share information but also to share in

the intellectual and spiritual growth of students. Hooks writes, "to teach in a manner

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[4] Feminist pedagogy aims for the class participants (students *and* teachers) not just to acquire new knowledge, but for their thinking to shift in new directions. It not only uses traditional sources of information, such as academic journals and books, but also the students' and teachers' own experiences are used as 'learning materials'. In the learning environment, the teacher figure and students work against the creation of a hierarchy of authority between teacher and student; the students also deliver 'content' and influence the design of the class (http://www.genderandeducation.com).

that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the

necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (13).

Journaling is one of the techniques that is often applied in the feminist classroom, and

can be useful as a way for adolescent girls to address their anxiety and stress about

body image.

Journaling is a great place to have girls start their journey to understanding their

ability and beauty. Journaling allows women to have the one safe space in which they

can express themselves however they like in their own privacy if they wish.

Day 3 – Consider How You Feel About Yourself:
The daily practice on day three is meant to help readers on how to enhance their

self-awareness while boosting their self-esteem and sense of body satisfaction. Molinary

expresses to her readers that it's important to understand where they have been in

regards to self-esteem and body satisfaction and where they would like to go. For this

daily practice, Molinary askes her readers to journal their answers to the following

questions: How do you feel about yourself and why? What will a healthy sense of self and

a healthy life provide?

This daily practice will hopefully get the readers to open up and see what their

real feelings about themselves are and to understand why they are feeling that way.

This can raise awareness and get the reader to think about what it is she'll want having a

healthy life style.

Day 6 – Ditch the Fat Chat:

The daily practice for day six talks about body hatred free for all among women. I

think almost all women have been in a situation where someone complains about a body

part they dislike and before you know it everyone else joins in on the conversation and is completely bashing their bodies. Because some of these negative statements can have a big impact on one's self perception, Molinary proposes to stop these personal attacks. Molinary challenges her readers to not join in the next time they hear a woman criticizing herself. Instead of joining in, she asks her readers to celebrate something you love about that person or tell her how wrong she is. She suggests readers to try it with themselves as well, to stop themselves from their own body bashing. Molinary writes, "we do others and ourselves a disservice when we allow these critiques to carry on" (pg. 8).

I believe this is a great daily practice. It happens so often and most times, individuals don't even realize they are joining in on the "fat chat." "Fat is also a feminist issue" assert Fikkan and Rothblum, "because women are held to higher standards of thinness and suffer greater penalties if they fall short" (Saguy, 2012). The "fat chat" and body bashing take a great toll on one's body image.

By young girls constantly hearing and telling themselves they are not good enough, thin enough or pretty enough sets them up for a poor body image. There are so many critics out there in the media and the world that the last thing young women need is to pick on themselves and join in on the body bashing and bashing of other females. If women all become a little bit more aware of this and participate in a conscious effort to stop criticizing other's bodies perhaps there would be significant changes in the way society perceives women's bodies.

Day 28 – Stop Comparing

The Stop Comparing daily practice explains that by women comparing themselves to others is setting themselves up to by unhappy. This is because none of comparison is the same as each individual person. No one has the same genetics, life experiences, or faces life like one another. In addition, individuals tend to put on the picture-perfect life and is usually not the reality of their life. Molinary tasks her readers to turn off their desire to compare. She wants her readers to be aware of the situation when it occurs and to reflect on it in their journal. She proposes her readers to think about who they are comparing themselves to, what purpose the comparison serves, and what the effect of comparison has. Molinary argues, by gaining an understanding of when and why one makes these comparisons, they can begin to gain the upper hand and stop the habit.

This habit of comparing ourselves with peers, the media etc. is another routine woman engage in without even realizing. As Molinary explains this is a way of setting ourselves up for unhappiness. By Molinary making her readers aware of the situation, hopefully young women will be more conscious of when it does happen and think twice about the next time it happens.

Day 30 – Name the Beautiful

Being that individuals often use a different standard of beauty for themselves than they do for others, Molinary asks her readers to figure out what they really find beautiful. This daily practice is uses to name individuals that they find beautiful and to figure out what makes these individuals beautiful. She asks readers to think about if they use these same standards when judging themselves. Naming the Beautiful is a great practice in that

readers will become aware that beauty does not always have to be about one's appearance.

Day 45 – Own Your Body

In this daily practice, Molinary talks about Molly Barker, founder of Girls on the Run International, as someone she respects. Through Girls on the Run programs, girls from third grade through middle school learn to honor themselves, embrace the concept of team, and become empowered to change their worlds. They are taught to understand that they are not objects and that the ownership of their bodies is theirs alone. Molly Barker also gave a name to a phenomenon that perhaps we have notices but never classified. The "Girl Box" is the place that girls find that they are inclined to morph into who they think they should be, rather than who they naturally are. In the Girl Box, body objectification begins in earnest. Society begins to judge girls on a universal standard, and girls begin to realize that by objectifying their own bodies, they can gain power to access.

Molinary challenges her readers to "own their body". She asks them to wrap their mind around the concept that they are the one who can choose to use their body or own it. She urges readers to understand that their bodies expand the universe and that it does not have to fit into this box that society suggests. She tasks readers to take ownership of what is rightfully theirs.

During puberty girls face a great amount of cultural pressures to split into what Mary Pipher calls "false selves." Pipher writes, "These pressures come from schools, magazines, music television, advertisements and movies. It comes from peers," explains Mary Pipher (1994), author of *Reviving Ophelia*. (pg. 14) "Girls can be true to themselves

and risk abandonment by their peers, or they can reject their true selves and be socially acceptable. Most girls choose to be socially accepted and split into two selves, one that is authentic and on that is culturally scripted." (pg. 14) Pipher continues to explain that authenticity is an "owning" of all experiences, including emotions and thoughts that are not socially acceptable. "Because self-esteem is based on the acceptance of all thoughts and feelings as one's own, girls lose confidence, as they "disown" themselves." (pg. 14) Feminist self-help books like *Beautiful You: A Daily Guide to Radical Self- Acceptance* have the potential to encourage girls to be their authentic selves.

Day 53 – Look 'Em in the Eyes

On Day fifty-three for daily practices, Molinary explains that so much of our confidence is projected through our eyes. Avoiding eye contact is just one way of communicating to the world that you want to be invisible. It also communicates to the person whose eyes you are avoiding that he or she isn't; worthy of being seen, even if you don't mean to send that message. For this task, readers are asked to slow down and look into the eyes of every person they speak to. She suggests they use this task as a test and to see if they can remember the person's eye color of whom they were speaking to. I agree that eye contact is extremely significant and can really display one's confidence.

Day 98 – Celebrate Yourself

This mission is for readers to cherish the beauty of who they are. By celebrating their attributes, readers are asked to complete the sentence, "I am…" in their journal. It's important to celebrate yourself because this helps in loving yourself and accepting who you are. Both are great steps in improving one's overall confidence and body image.

Day 196 – Go Without Makeup

Molinary reminds her readers that they can become too dependent on our "made-up" looks which, if they aren't careful, can make them feel dissatisfied with our real skin. For this assignment, Molinary urges readers to give their skin a rest and give themselves a breather by going without makeup. She asks readers to realize that their identity is rooted in their soul not their rouged chees or mascara enhances lashes.

This is a great practice in that it insures us that beauty is not only skin deep and it breaks down the cultural practices and inequalities between men and women. According to feminist scholars, makeup use is strongly associated with assumptions about health, heterosexuality and credibility in the workplace. Authors Dellinger and Williams (1997) conducted a study where they analyzed twenty in-depth interviews with a diverse group of women who worked in a variety of settings to examine the appearance rules that women confront at work and to see how these rules reproduce assumptions about sexuality and gender. These authors explored how women express themselves and assert autonomy within the structural constraints imposed by social institutions. Dellinger and Williams explain, "Feminists have appropriated Foucault's *docile body thesis* to understand the obsessive practices of weight control, fashion, and cosmetic surgery. Foucault maintained that the body is a central location for the expression and reproduction of power relationships." (pg. 152) Not only did these authors link makeup use with health, heterosexuality and credibility in the workplace, but they also associated these qualities with professional success. Lastly, Dellinger and Williams suggest that this cultural practice has consequences that reproduce

inequalities between men and women and also between different groups of women. As feminists, it is our job to conceptualize women's relationships with their bodies both as a reflection of social construction and as their own reply to the cultural ideals of femininity.

Day 364 – Champion All Women

This daily practices is very powerful as Molinary mandates the importance of supporting all women. She explains that supporting one another and freeing one another from the limiting messages that women receive and can be revolutionary. She writes, "We can have the power in our lives by not taking in negative messages, and we can empower other women by not sending out negative messages". She reminds readers that we are all beautiful, powerful women and that they must make the choice to always present their authentic selves. Molinary reminds her readers that they are women of all colors and cultures, and they can make a world that does not relegate them to a type. She suggests that women can choose to live in a world that celebrates wholeness and complexities within the gender and women can choose to create a society that unites them in their commonalities while acknowledging the depth of the individual.

For this daily practice, she encourages readers to raise their voice and demand an end to a narrowly defined beauty mystique. In addition she tasks readers to start each day with the intentions of championing themselves and others.

This daily practice provides readers with an empowering passage. This passage displays great insight on how we should be open minded, choose to celebrate wholeness and acknowledge our depth and individuality. This passage enables women

to view our gender as a whole, to be there and defend and support one another. This passage is a reminder to stand beside each other and fight our battles together not against each other, starting with ourselves.

Conclusion

Cultural notions about what is attractive and desirable are generally made before children enter school (Thompson, Sheinberg, Altabe, & Tantleef-Dunn, 2002). Thus, children have learned a preference for athletic and lean body size before they have learned to read. Researchers have examined the influence of beliefs about thinness and likeability among children (Thompson et al., 2002). In a sample of third, fourth and fifth graders, a belief about the importance of thinness was significant, whereas obvious peer messages did not predict eating behaviors or body image. Thus, even young children may be aware of the sociocultural pressures for thinness and against weight gain.

Being aware of unconscious comparison is a good step in taking care of one's well-being and body. It's natural to look at peers or friends for comparison however it's not a good idea. Comparing ourselves with others is problematic because everyone develops differently at different times. It's also a bad idea to compare one's self with celebrities and models because often times the pictures we see are unrealistic. In reality, most people don't look like the limited body types shown in the media.

According to feminist scholarship, self-help books represent both danger and potential. Zimmerman et al., argue that self-help books can be dangerous if they are inaccurate, fail to separate an author's opinion from research findings, and/or contain

suggestions that do not recognize gender and diversity issues (2001. p.164). According to the authors, "the popularity of self-help books makes the authors' messages or guidance seem important, right, or truthful, regardless of its accuracy." (165) In their study they examined the eleven best-selling self-help books published between 1988 and 1998 to analyze the degree to which they reinforced feminist family therapy principles and practices. The self-help books on which they conducted content analysis included *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus; Women Who Love Too Much,* among others.

One of their key findings was that the ways that the author of a self-help book conceptualizes gender are very important. Self-help books can, according to these scholars, conceptualize gender as an inherent, immutable fact. Self-help books can also barely address gender. The most feminist approach the authors saw in self-help books was one that addressed gender as socially constructed through processes such as socialization (3). Interestingly, the authors also examined the absence or presence of a hierarchical orientation on the part of an author. Feminist texts reflected feminist pedagogical techniques such as a nonhierarchical orientation. The authors concluded that the most popular books they examined were the least feminist of the books. They write: "It is possible that these books are popular because they confirm and support the dominant discourse of a status quo in which men and women are viewed as being inherently different and in which men ultimately hold more power than women" (173). In addition, as noted earlier, the best-selling self-help books appear to have become less feminist over time.

In *Women and Self-Help Culture* (1992), Wendy Simonds describes interviews she conducted with thirty women about why they were attracted to self-help books. Her interviews showed that readers approach self-help books hoping to discover how to achieve a balance between self and other, and to develop self-identity that they feel they lack (6). Her interest is in the ways in which self-help books addressed specifically to women encourage women to develop their "selves," and whether these selves are the ideal womanly self or feminist, self-realized self. She found that her interviewees saw the activity of reading self-help books as "a serious and self-reflective activity, in which they seek a deep connection with the material they read, hoping, indeed, to read themselves." (pg. 47) Her participants described their reading as a way for them to gain insights into their lives and their problems through the words of experts. She explicates Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) as a self-help book, writing that Friedan wanted to forge a connection, enable other women to experience awakenings like hers in their own lives, to help women who suffered as she had.

Simonds further points out that self-help books propose to help women find out about themselves and to teach them effective ways of being. "Authors operate on the assumption that we don't know how to do this on our own and that is understandable because we have been routinely mistaught. Sometime, according to self-help authors, we need a lot of changing; at other times we need self-acceptance," she writes. Simonds argues that acceptance becomes a sort of paradoxical basis for accomplishing change and identity becomes a messy accumulation of past experiences that need to be sorted through and reprioritized for most women. The primary change advocated by self-help

authors for women is to place less value in involvements with others and to pay more attention to personal development. "Self-help teaches women marketing strategies to use on ourselves" claims Simonds. Despite these warnings about the potential anti-feminist dangers of self-help books, they can also be empowering tools for women.

Just as I have displayed both pros and cons of turning to self help books in regards to body image, my focus group also felt the use of self-help books to have both positives and negatives. One participant believes turning to a self-help book can be comforting in that it makes someone realize they are not the only one's looking for help however it can make the situation worse by unveiling additional complications. She compared self-help books to self-diagnosing oneself online, individuals start to wonder and consider additional problems.

Another member reported self-help books being good because individuals don't necessarily have to tell anyone what their feeling are however she also narrated situations can be so server that you need to talk with someone, one on one. She raised a valid point in that one may retain the information from a self-help book but don't actually do anything to change their habits. She proposed the question of "Are you analyzing yourself to actually do the changes or are you going to read it and say I know what's wrong"? In addition, she pointed out that talking to someone one on one rather than a self-help book can provide recommendations of what to do and actually do them with you. In talking to someone, they usually help step by step and a self-help book will tell you how to do it step by step but that's the readers choice to follow through or not.

Lastly, another member felt as though self-help books are biased because individuals have their own perceptions and ideas of how they view themselves and self-help books are typically too general. She claimed they are too vague and the authors can't empathize with the reader on a personal level that they can relate to. Individuals can usually relate better by having an actual conversation with someone. This student also noted that self-help books are frequently written for an author's own personal gain and readers can commonly sense that. In addition, this participant felt that authors don't really understand, it's just someone providing tips and advice of things individuals already know. She claimed it's a vicious cycle.

Beautiful You: A daily Guide to Radical Self-Acceptance is extremely powerful and a great start for individuals to work on their self-acceptance. This book draws on self-awareness, creativity and mind-body connections. The author accurately describes the text as a practical and inspirational tool for realizing a healthy self- image through championing one's own emotional and physical well-being. I argue that *Beautiful You* is an example of a feminist self-help book, because its depiction of gender is sophisticated, it reveals social constraints and the ways that society reinforces dominant gender norms. In addition Molinary's argument is non–hierarchical, uses care in its philosophy and incorporates the description of a feminist self-realized self.

Daily practices can yield new patterns of thinking and those patterns ultimately yield new habits that will renew one's sense of self in a positive, dynamic, and healthy way. Molinary provides a wide array of daily practices that include making a budget, setting limits, journaling, meditating, singing out loud, facing your fears, watching

empowering movies, taking a trip, talking less and many others. These interventions

quiet individuals and moves them to find clarity. *Beautiful You* encourages readers to

develop their own insights through compassionate observation and careful execution.

Over time, once women have a clearer sense of self, self-confidence becomes a habit.

In addition, self –help reading confirms the strength women display in caring;

indeed, woman-authored self-help books, if done well, may serve as an example of

"woman-to-woman care" (Simonds, 1992). For most readers, care is the core of both

the problem and their search to remedy or temporarily relieve it. Women care

abundantly and men, not enough. Self –help books usually enlarge this into women

caring too much and men's methods often become representations for women to

follow.

In American culture, women are great consumers because they buy products

that can assist them in self-care (Simonds, 1992). Ironically, the media highlights all

products in a way to prove they can be used to signify care. Consumerism is a vicious

cycle because what sells individuals on buying is the obtaining of self in which the media

advertises and constantly reinforces (self-help books included). Gonick (2006) argues

that "in the time of uncertainty, the future is thought to be securable through creating

and enhancing powerful identities acquirable by consuming the right products, having

the right look, and resolving difficulties and problems by following the guidelines for

self-improvement found in self-help books"(Gonick, 2006).

I turn now in my final chapter to the third positive body image intervention I will

examine. New York City was the first city to launch a self-esteem initiative to help girls

believe their value comes from their character, skills, and attributes – not their

appearance. I turn to a critical examination of the New York City Girls Project now.

Chapter Four

The New York City Girls Project: Promoting a Healthy Body Image through a Public Health Campaign

In fall 2013, New York City became the first major city in the nation to tackle the issue of girls' self-esteem and body image. Recognizing that girls as young as six and seven are struggling with body image and self-esteem issues, New York City has launched an initiative to help girls believe their value comes from their character, skills, and attributes – not their appearance. "Over eighty percent of ten year old girls are afraid of being fat and by middle school, forty to seventy percent of girls are dissatisfied with two or more parts of their body" notes the NYC Girls Project website. *New York Magazine* reports that the $330,000 campaign is called "NYC Girls Project" and its ads feature twenty-one girls of different ages, and races, including daughters of city workers.

The multi-agency, multi-faceted project includes a public education campaign consisting of posters and other images, geared toward girls age's seven to twelve appearing on buses, subways, and phone kiosks. The images feature a diverse group of girls performing activities like reading, playing sports, and drawing with the words: "I'm a girl. I'm smart, a leader, adventurous, friendly, funny, I'm beautiful the way I am." The campaign invites girls to share what makes them beautiful the way they are through the social media hash tag, #ImAGirl. This project also contains a girls' self-esteem curriculum, "Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health, and Leadership." This dynamic health-and-wellness education program was developed at

the Harvard Medical School by leading clinician and an acclaimed curriculum designer. It

addresses critical issues of body obsession and reduces risk for disordered eating in girls

grades three to eight. (Steiner-Adair, 2014) Emphasizing girls' personal power and

mental and physical well-being, this eight-session program designed for girls ten to

fifteen years old is the first to show sustained, positive changes in girls' body image,

body satisfaction, and body esteem. Topics include, increased self and body acceptance,

healthier eating and exercise habits, advanced leadership and media literacy skills, and a

rage of coping skills for resisting unhealthy peer and cultural pressures. Each unit of this

curriculum ends with a "Call to Action" to help girls translate their new-found

knowledge into positive action at school, home and in their community. The City piloted

the NYC Girls Project in two Summer Quest summer school programs during the

summer of 2013 and by that fall 2013 it was expanded to up to two hundred after-

school programs in the New York City-area school groups.

      As part of the initiative, in partnership with the city and SPARK Movement[5], The

Paley Center for Media, has developed two new class offerings for its K-12 education

program. The Paley Center leads the discussion about cultural, creative and social

significance of television, radio, and emerging platforms for the professional community

and media-interested public. (Paleycenter, 2014) With locations in New York and Los

Angeles, The Paley Center examines the intersections between media and society. It

also serves as a neutral location where media professionals can engage in discussion

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[5] SPARK Movement is an intergenerational, girl-fueled activist movement that works to push back against the sexualization of girls and support the development of girls' healthy sexuality and self-esteem. http://www.sparksummit.com/

and debate about the new emerging media arena. "Girls, Body Image and the Media"

helps students look critically at television programs targeting girls that send messages,

both positive and negative, about body image and ideals of beauty. A brief history of

girls on television traces the evolution of the representation of girls on television, from

the 1950s to the present (NYC Girls Project, 2014). As with all Paley Center curricula, the

classes are offered on-site for New York City-area school groups. Paley Center educators

have assembled a decade-by-decade visual history of the changing portrayal of girls on

television – a unique resource created by this collaboration. Clips from this compilation

have been utilized in the classes as a catalyst for discussion and have been made

available for others.

The Issues Behind the Campaign

Even as women have made enormous strides in education, politics, and the

workplace, as I have demonstrated in my earlier chapters, girls report struggling with

body image, self-esteem and stories about bullying around appearance and sexual

behavior at younger and younger ages. Girls' dissatisfaction manifests around body

image, particularly weight, at an alarmingly young age.

A major challenge, which has driven this project, is the amount of unhappiness

and pressure from the media, which presents images that tend to portray a narrow

standard of beauty. According to the Girl Scouts of the USA and The Dove Self-Esteem

Fund, "eighty-one percent of girls would rather see "real" or "natural" photos of models

than touched-up, airbrushed versions, yet forty seven percent say fashion magazines

give them a body image to strive for." Sixty-three percent of girls think the body image

represented by the fashion industry is unrealistic and forty-seven percent think it is

unhealthy, yet sixty percent say that they compare their bodies to fashion models.

Forty-eight percent wish they were as skinny as the models in fashion magazines, and

thirty-one percent of girls admit to starving themselves or refusing to eat as a strategy

to lose weight. In short, girls see images that – despite recognizing that they are

unrealistic, unattainable, and often not even real – they aspire to meet and then suffer

when they can't help but fail to do so. The impact of these struggles on girls' psyches

may be incalculable. "There are additional real and measurable health consequences

that make this a policy obligation, such as eating disorders, bullying, alcohol abuse, early

onset of sexual activity and obesity" (New York City's Girl Project, 2014).

While there are groups that advocate and provide support for girls, until this

campaign no city government in the United States has addressed the issue of girls' self-

esteem and body image. The multi-pronged, cross-agency approach has fought to

change social norms with a public education campaign that provides a counter message

of positive, aspirational images to combat the media bombardments that girls are

influenced by every day. It is accompanied by a curriculum that promotes healthy

eating, positive body image and self–esteem, and teaches girls to think critically about,

and challenge, constructed media images.

The NYC Girls Project was a movement that shocked the community by its

unexpected emergence that swept the city. Allyson Byers states, "there are plenty of

things that will paint the legacy of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg when he

departs office after unprecedented twelve year tenure. Feminism is an unlikely one."

(Byers, 2013) In September of 2013 the mayor's office took on just that by way of a

massive campaign to tackle body image and lift girls' self-esteem. With "I'm a Girl"

posters that appear on subways and city buses, and a curriculum that was piloted in

seventy-five after-school programs, which quickly grew to two hundred – the campaign

was aimed to help girls believe their values come from their character and skills, not

their appearance.

The current mayor, Bill De Blasio, believes that New York has become a "tale of

two cities" relative to income disparity, overall quality of life, and a shrinking middle

class. He calls for "One New York, Rising Together"

(http://www.decidenyc.com/election-candidate/bill-deblasio/, 2013). De Blasio intends

to make workplaces more family friendly, ensure equal pay for equal work, support

women and minority owned businesses, support education for girls and women, protect

reproductive choice, protect immigrant victims of domestic violence and many other

intentions to improve women and girls of New York. Below are some examples of the

NYC Girls Project posters that were displayed throughout the city.

These posters do a great job in displaying young girls doing what they love. The images include an array of ethnicities as well as countless activities. They are bright and welcoming to the eye, joyful and positive. All the girls in the pictures are smiling as they are shown doing hobbies they appear to enjoy. You can't help but feel delighted when viewing these posters.

Reporter Allyson Byers spoke with Samantha Levine, the woman who created the campaign. Byers is a former staff member of Planned Parenthood and the deputy press secretary to the mayor. Byers reports that "New York City has really led the nation when it comes to changing the conversation or making people aware of issues" (Byers, 2013, pg. 1). By viewing the posters and images throughout the city, female adolescents will gain awareness about their bodies. Other individuals will be encouraged to do less bashing and more supporting. She also expresses that individuals on twitter were saying, they need this campaign in their cities and there was even a request to get some of the materials posted in France. The reaction has been very positive. It will be interesting to see if this campaign actually starts a national dialogue or a national interest in seeing other cities adopt something similar.

Levine organized focus groups in 2014 to see if anything from the posters would resonate with young girls based on this campaign. Two groups of nine year olds and two groups of ten to twelve year olds were asked their opinion on the posters. The response from the girls was that they love the New York City Girls Project. Some girls said "wow, that makes me think that it's okay to be dirty, not dress up all of the time, not wear make-up and go have fun and still be considered beautiful and still be confident in who I

am" (Byers, 2013 pg. 1). It is gratifying that the campaign resonated in the way in which

it was intended. In summary, Byers provides the future hope for the campaign as:

If girls could take away the message that their value comes from their skills, their character and their attributes and not their appearance. And if we also succeeded in expanding the idea of what is considered beautiful beyond an unhealthy and unrealistic notion. One of the things that were so important was using 21 different real girls – no models – in this campaign, because we wanted to reflect back to girl's images of themselves with the message, "I'm beautiful the way I am." We wanted girls to see as beautiful the faces that they see surrounding them every day. (Byers, 2013, pg. 1)

While these are realistic images of healthy girls out doing activities they enjoy, social

media can have potential negative influences on young girls.

The Potential Negative Impacts of Social Media

In today's evolving society, it is evident that pop culture, media and

entertainment have a substantial influence on individuals. Social media websites allow

users to create personal profiles that can contain personal information, photographs,

videos and sound clips. According to the Virtual Media Center, the top three most

visited networking sites include Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. "Facebook alone has

over 200 million users worldwide" (Virtual Media Center, 2014). There have been

numerous studies displaying both the risks and benefits of social media.

It's undeniable that getting comfortable in a changing body is a daily concern for

most teenagers. "Ironically, more teens are obese than ever before, primarily because

they eat junk food instead of fruits and vegetables and they do not get enough exercise"

explains Brown and Witherspoon (pg. 158). Obesity rates have escalated because the

very act of attending to the media requires no physical effort and contributes to weight

gain. Additionally, the media portrays food and people in a way that leads paradoxically to both obesity and an obsession with thinness. The majority of commercials during children's programming promote foods with low nutritional value such as candy, soft drinks, sugared cereals, potato chips, etc. (Brown; Witherspoon, 2002).

Teen girls are most at risk for developing eating disorders as they struggle with a body that is getting bigger in a culture that simultaneously sells them junk food and tells them they should be thin. According to Brown and Witherspoon, "the media-depicted ideal of female beauty has become thinner over the past thirty years and the difference between the idealized body under that of the average young woman has increased" (pg. 159). The simple inactivity of much media use decreases the amount of time available for and perhaps motivation to engage in more strenuous and health-promoting activities and probably increases the desirability and consumption of high-fat and high-sugar foods, thus making it more difficult to develop a healthy body Brown; Witherspoon, 2002).

Furthermore, the way women feel about their bodies today is actually worse according to a recent Glamour survey of 1,000 women ages eighteen to forty. In 1984 Glamour asked their readers how they felt about their bodies and now, thirty years later they interviewed 1,000 American women again to see what has changed. Author Shaun Dreisbach (2014) explains that in 2014 alone, we have seen a rise of no-make up selfies, thanks to Beyoncé, celebrities condemning "fat-talk," and a body-pride anthem, "All About That Bass." While these celebrities are working hard to empower young girls, it is unfortunate to see that girls today are still suffering from body image matters more then

ever. "Today fifty four percent of women – thirteen percent more than in 1941- are unhappy with their body, and eighty percent say just looking in the mirror makes them feel bad" reports Dreisbach. The researchers of the Glamour Health Insight study on body image decided to dig deeper to find out what's behind the new epidemic of self-hatred and what the minority of women who do love their bodies are doing right.

One major difference that was reported is that the obesity rates in the United States have doubled. While the country as a whole has gained weight, the even bigger difference is the new phenomenon of social media. "In the 2014 survey, a huge number of women – sixty four percent – reported that looking at pictures on sites like Facebook and Instagram make them feel bad about their body" explains Dreisbach. This study reports that women now have a bigger platform than ever to obsess over appearance. The reason why social media has a huge negative impact is because women not only compare themselves to celebrities and models but they now compare themselves with everyone on social media including friends, family, and even the girl next door. Dreisbach reports that twice as many women judge themselves against people they know. It was also reported that 60 percent of women today claim they crop, filter or retouch their pictures. "When you see just a woman's parts, as you often do on social media – her 'bikini bridge' or her 'thigh gap' or sculpted abs – you stop seeing your own body as a whole, wonderful thing" writes Fox (pg. 138).

In addition, social media fuels a need for validation by others. "So many women have gotten onto this path of constantly needing validation from others 'liking' or pinning their photos" explains Lara Pence (2014), a body image specialist. Pence further explains,

"at the end of the day, even if you have a fairly decent body image, you're not going to feel good enough" (Pence, 2014, pg. 139). All participants of my focus group reported comparing their bodies to peers and or celebrities on social media. They noted comparisons in how other look, how their dressed, how their bodies looked and wondering why they can look a certain way or wear certain clothing.

All this approval seeking is intensified by the sheer amount of online exposure. Today we are looking at more images than ever before. According to Dreisbach, "1.8 billion photos are uploaded and shared every day on Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, Snapchat and WhatsApp alone." (pg.139) One focus group member in particular reported social media being very impactful during high school. Her high school had a special prom dress page where girls uploaded a picture of their prom dress to make sure somebody else didn't buy the same one. She explained that she did not upload a picture of her dress because she felt it spoiled the fun of prom and too the surprise out of her outfit. She also communicated that one of her peers spent a thousand dollars on a prom dress to ensure no one else would purchase the exact one.

Today we are constantly consuming media while thirty years ago people looked at magazines here and there and watched a little TV. Dreisbach shares, women in Glamour's survey said they spend an average of four and a half hours a day online and more than two hours just on social media alone. Their data found that the more time women spent online each day, the more self-conscious they tended to be about their body (Dreisbach, 2014).

For most women, weight and body shape are tethered to who they fundamentally are as a person, tied to their success at work, in relationships and all aspects of their lives. This is what makes negative body image so toxic (Dreisbach, 2014). Fox explains, "if you feel bad about your body, you feel bad about who you are at the core" (Fox, 2014, pg. 139) Researcher Dr. Lisa Wade, suggests "telling women today, 'Your body is beautiful no matter what' doesn't sink in. Even if there's a logical argument, emotionally we're still getting powerful messages about what society thinks is the perfect body, and if we don't have it, we're weak" (Wade, 2014, pg. 140)

Dreisbach argues that women's identities and lives are often wrapped up in noting where their looks fall short instead of celebrating them. A few suggestions she makes to women in the article include, asking yourself what would make you the happiest, stop comparing, do an Internet self-check to see how you feel after you logged off, give your body some TLC and try out a positive word for oneself, by thinking it and saying to help rewire the brain from thinking negatively.

Researchers also believe a growing number of children are ignoring age requirements on sites such as Facebook and MySpace, or using social – networking sites designed just for them. Facebook and MySpace require users to be at least thirteen, however there are no practical ways to verify ages, and many young users pretend to be older when signing up. According to a CNN report, some scientists worry that pre–adolescent use of the sites can be damaging to children's relationships and brains, while some therapists have linked this to Internet addiction among adults (Gross, 2009).

It has been found that more than half of children use social media by the age of ten and that Facebook is the most popular site for youngsters to join (Daily Mail Report, 2014). With Facebook at the top of the list of sites to which children have signed up under-age, fifty-two percent of eight to sixteen year olds in one study admitted they had ignored the official age limit. Other popular sites include WhatsApp, used by forty percent of eight to sixteen year olds, BBM at 24%, and SnapChat at eleven percent.

While twitter and Facebook have quickly established themselves as the concrete social networks across almost every major industry for adult users, these platforms, while still popular, certainly aren't the "be all and end all" with the younger demographic. Indeed, image-led social platforms, such as Tumbler, Instagram and Snapchat, are rapidly growing in popularity amongst thirteen to nineteen year olds (Bennett, 2013). Sites like Instagram and Snapchat, which are growing quickly in popularity among the teen population, signal a shift in how teens use social media. Bennett articulates that ninety-one percent of teens in social media are posting photos of themselves; seventy-one percent display their school names; fifty three percent share their email addresses; seventy one percent present their cities or towns in which they live; and shockingly twenty percent provide their cell phone numbers.

According to the *Daily Mail Reporter* (2014), although fifty-nine percent of children are social networking by ten years old, just thirty two percent of parents feel "very confident" about helping them stay safe online. This poll also found that twenty one percent of children had posted negative comments, starting from an average age of eleven and twenty six percent hijacked another person's account and posted without

permission. "Some forty three percent had messaged strangers, starting from an average age of twelve" (The Daily Reporter, 2014). The study suggests that children are most likely to post an image or video of themselves online or set up a fake profile for the first time at the age of eleven, try twitter and message a stranger at twelve and try services like SnapChat and Ask.fm at the age of thirteen. "While sixty three percent of parents check their child's internet activity at least once a week, more than a fifth (twenty one percent) are not confident they could install parental controls, and just under a half (forty six percent) admit not being confident or aware of the school internet policy" (The Daily Reporter, 2014)).

Because social media has removed the barriers between a young person's public and private self, children can become vulnerable and compulsive online sharing can lead to dangerous circumstances. According to The Daily Reporter, children are gaining access to social media sites at a younger age, which could expose them to content, people or situations that are out of their depth and for which they are not emotionally prepared. This survey suggests that parents can no longer protect their children by simply trying to limit their online experiences. Instead parents need to maintain an open dialogue and encourage children to share both good and bad online experiences, talk openly and straightforwardly about the risks they may encounter online without scaring them and make sure they keep up with the latest social media craze. In addition they should work with their children rather than trying to control them.

The Potential Benefits of Social Media

While there are risks inherent in online social networking, there are also many potential benefits. Many experts have claimed the Internet offers wonderful learning opportunities for growing and inquisitive young minds. Social networking can provide opportunities for new relationships as well as strengthening existing relationships. Bennett (2013) reports that nine out of ten teenagers have used social media and sixty percent of them have their profiles set to private which means that social media is a great connection for public education campaigns like the New York City Girls Project.

"Online interactions provide the teen with a venue to learn and refine self-control; relate to others and respect their viewpoints and opinions; express sentiments; and to engage in critical thinking and decision making" (Virtual Media Clinic, 2014). According to an article from Parentfurther.com, children can gain social confidence from interacting with other individuals online, find support in online communities, be exposed to many diverse viewpoints, ideas and opinions, as well as become more familiar with new and developing technologies. (http://www.parentfurther.com/technology-media/social-networking/benefits) One member of my focus group reported using Tumbler which is blog site as which includes some in particular with empowerment and promoting body positivity.

Despite the negative effects I noted earlier, social media, online applications and tools can be a great arena in supporting adolescent females. With technology constantly on the rise and more and more children using social media, the New York City Girls Project (2013) uses social media to spread the positive message of body acceptance to

their targeted audience of young females. But as I have argued, social media must be used with care.

The Virtual Media Center has shared some insight in managing social networking site usage. They claim, "it's not the internet or a specific place online per se, but rather online behavior and psychosocial problems that are most influential in explaining the likelihood of online victimization" (Virtual Media Center, 2014).

Parents monitoring teenagers' whereabouts and activities may be the most direct influence on adolescent behavior and may serve to minimize risks. Given that parental supervision is a key protective factor against teen risk-taking behavior, it is reasonable to assume that unmonitored Internet use may place adolescents at risk for cyber bullying, unwanted exposure to pornography and potentially revealing personal information to sexual predators. Some studies have reported that children whose parents monitor their online activities were less likely to disclose personal information, seek out inappropriate sites, and conduct chat conversations with strangers (Daily Mail Reporter, 2014)

In order to minimize the adverse effects of online social networking, parents should be aware what their children are doing on the Internet and ask about their Internet usage. They should be alert as to where, what topics and with whom their children are talking online as well as set curfews for using the Internet. Computers should also be placed in a shared space where they can be monitored. There is hope for young women to enhance their self-acceptance with these parental precautions and the rise of effective public education campaigns.

The Effects of Public Education Campaigns

Communication campaigns like the NYC Girls Project are an organized

communication activity, directed at a particular population for a particular period of

time, to achieve a particular goal. "The term campaign includes organized,

communication-based interventions aimed at large groups of people and social

marketing efforts that include communication activities" (Snyder, 2007). Campaigns vary

widely in the particular communication activities they use, including posters, handouts,

public service announcements, discussion groups, workplace or clinic-based counseling,

and in-school presentations. Campaigns that count at least one form of media among

their communication channels are termed "mediated campaigns" (Snyder, 2007). There

are three critical elements to an effective public education campaign: goals, strategy

and research (Snyder, 2007).

Snyder (2007) reports, "knowing the average effect size for campaigns can

establish a benchmark against which to compare the effects of specific campaigns, help

establish realistic goals for a new campaign, and provide guidance when designing

evaluations." He claims it's more important to know the amount of campaign effects.

The effects conveyed are typically the change in behavior in an intervention community

or group from pre-campaign to post-campaign. "In the United States, health

communication campaigns that include use of the mass media and avoid coercion have

an average effect size of about five percentage points" (Snyder, 2007, pg. S33). For

example, if sixty percent of people were doing the target behavior before the campaign,

about sixty five percent can be predicted to do the health behavior after the campaign.

It has been noted that on average, European campaigns using media are also successful.

Across health issues, campaigns promoting the adoption of a behavior that is new to the individual or replacement of an old behavior with a new one have a greater success rate. On the other hand, it's much more difficult for campaigns aiming to cease an unhealthy behavior people are already doing or prevent commencement of a risky behavior.

Often specified in a logic, persuasion, or behavior change model for a campaign, knowledge, beliefs and interpersonal communication are thought of as intermediate outcomes helpful in attaining the goal of behavioral change. The ability to get movement on attitudes, beliefs and knowledge depends in part on whether the messages were designed to affect those specific components, and it is often unclear from published accounts whether the messages were so designed. The New York City Girls Project enables young women to become knowledgeable about self-acceptance, and provides them individual ways to connect and communicate with the campaign.

Campaign goals specify what the campaign is designed to accomplish within a period of time. The goals state the desired outcomes, such as the specific behavior that the campaign is promoting. The goals should be clear about the target population. Campaign objectives, which are more detailed versions of goals, should also specify the target level of change. The objectives should be measurable and able to be used as criteria for campaign success during evaluation. Brown and Witherspoon report that no matter what form of communication is being used, the message needs to resonate with

the target audience. Their study noted that some successful campaigns included teens in the design of the message (Brown & Witherspoon, 2002). Brown and Witherspoon also mentioned public health media campaigns should focus mainly on the early stages of building awareness, information seeking and knowledge, as well as complement other community, policy, or individual-level activities over the long term in order to be effective.

The NYC Girls Project seems to have all the elements of a successful campaign: goals, strategy, research, consciousness raising, and individual level activities. This mediated campaign encourages the use of social media by inspiring young girls to post pictures of themselves doing activities that allow them to be considered beautiful. The girl's self-esteem curriculum, "Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health and Leadership" is the ideal resource for helping girls make healthy choices for themselves (Steiner-Adair, 2014).

Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health and Leadership, the curriculum associated with the NYC Girls Project, is a program for healthy growing girls in middle school and has been proven to boost girls self- and body–esteem. "Evaluated with more than eight hundred girls, this primary prevention curriculum is the first of its kind to show sustained, positive changes in girls' body image, body satisfaction, and body esteem" explains Steiner- Adair (2014). The goal of this program is to help girls stay healthy and confident or "full of themselves." This goal is reached by teaching growing girls a range of positive attitudes and behaviors about healthy eating, exercise, body image and self-care.

Steiner-Adair (2014) suggests that in order for girls to fully benefit from this program, it is crucial for there to be support from the entire school. She also encourages schools to make it possible for girls to attend all of the eight program sessions, create a supportive school setting, one that simultaneously addresses risk factors (for disordered eating and body preoccupation) and promote protective factors as well. In addition, it's important to provide parent education as well by hosting a parent education night to educate all interested parents about the content of the program and to teach them how they can support this initiative at home.

This curriculum provides girls with ten key ideas to take into consideration while participating in this program. The first key idea is, "Be "full of yourself" in the very best sense of the phrase and throw your weight around in healthy ways. Girls need to feel comfortable taking up space in the world and expressing their opinions without hesitation, even in the face of disagreement" (Steiner-Adair, 2014). Other key ideas include, bringing a critical eye to media images; choosing powerful role models; no matter what your size, it's fun to move and exercise; relational health is a key aspect of overall well-being; it's not that looks don't matter…but what matters *most*? This curriculum also provides schools with tips to create a culture that supports student wellbeing and also warning signs for eating disorders. Furthermore, it includes assessments that measure the schools policies and procedures, the schools environment, the staff, the curriculum and of course the students.

All participants of my focus group on positive body image interventions felt that public awareness plays a great role in bringing attention to positive body image. One

representative in particular believed the more positive body image is talked about, the

more individuals hear about and think about it. Another participant explained that

"campaigns help people to understand that its okay to be bigger however at the same

time you don't want to be fat, you want to be thick. Slim – thick, there's a limit".

Someone else explained the seeing more positive body image campaigns will defiantly

help because "there are plenty of people who are confident and who think they look

great but are bombarded with messages from the media thrown in their face and it

makes you second guess your self a lot".

When I asked the group, what they would do if they had the power and

authority to aid in promoting a positive body image, two thirds said a public campaign.

One participant suggested, "more campaigns showing all different body types, like the

Dove campaign from a few years ago. I'm a marketing major so maybe that's why I'm

looking into this but I think those things do work because that's when you use social

media for positivity and that's when your able to spread the word about positive body

image." Another student explained, "if I was to have an event or marketing campaign it

would be called Eat What You Please, because with body image it has always been a

problem to obtain the ideal body based on certain food's you've eaten, for example soft

drinks. With Eat What you Please one can eat and drink what they want while still loving

yourself and loving your body image. Your body image is not something that's objective,

it's all about you and not about how someone else feels." This participant explained that

the campaign would include anyone who wanted to be involved, celebrities, town's

people, etc. Anyone just enjoying themselves eating what they want, even to make it a group festival. The entire group loved this idea.

While I have demonstrated the dangers social media can pose to adolescent girls, I have also tried to show the ways that the NYC Girls Project public education campaign—if alert to those dangers—has the potential to reach girls in great and greater numbers. In the conclusion I provide a synopsis of what each intervention offers for female adolescents.

Conclusion

Body image has been an ongoing concern for females for over a hundred years. As Brumberg points out, young girls in American society are left unsupported and extremely vulnerable to the excess of popular culture and to pressure from peers without many societal protections. It has only gotten worse with the passage of time. Girls today are concerned with their appearance as a primary expression of their individual identities.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the female body poses an immense problem for American girls, and it does so because of the culture in which we live (Brumberg, 1997). Female bodies are criticized through constant peer comparison, our cultural messages and of course the media. Pipher reaffirms that the issues adolescent girls struggle with are barely discussed in our culture. Unfortunately, "language doesn't fit their experiences." (Pipher, 1994, pg. 14).

Poor self-image is not just the province of the young. It affects women of all ages and is not limited to any socioeconomic group, race, culture or worldview. Bordo references the body as a site of political struggle. Bordo writes, "the physical body can, however, also be an instrument and medium of power" (pg. 143). Bordo confirms that females' bodies have historically been significantly more vulnerable than male bodies to extremes in both forms of cultural manipulation of the body. "The social manipulation of the female body emerged as an absolutely central strategy in the maintenance of power relations between the sexes over the past hundred years" writes Bordo (pg. 143).

The way women feel about their bodies, their dissatisfaction with their bodies, does not exist in a vacuum. It surrounds them, affecting how they feel about themselves and the lives they are living. In this master's thesis I have tried to demonstrate how important it is to have a healthy body image and how many individuals and institutions play a role in the body image of adolescent females.

Feminists have argued that rather than trying to encourage women to struggle to meet a cultural demand, women should accept and celebrate the bodies that they have. Stated more globally, many feminists believe that the only way to truly improve women's body image and reduce the broad spread of eating disorders among women is through advocating equality of the genders and discouraging the view that women are defined by their appearance. Many authors have argued that strategies designed to help women meet an extreme, culturally defined ideal only perpetuate the inherent sexism of American culture. The likely failure that women experience only reinforces women's negative feelings about their bodies and themselves. Our society teaches that sex, drugs and purchasing power lead to the good life. We need to rebuild the media so that its values are not aggressive to the values we must adopt in order to survive. These changes will not happen overnight but we can work together toward a new century in which men and women truly have equal power in our culture.

The three interventions I have highlighted have a positive effect on females' body image and self-confidence. They provide young women the tools they need to reach self-acceptance and self-concept. These interventions demonstrate how individuals and institutions have an effect on girls' self-concept and body image. They

also provide creative ways to empower young women by enhancing their self-concept and guiding them towards self- acceptance. *The Body Image Survival Guide For Parents, Beautiful You,* and the New York City Girls Project all provide insight and support in promoting girls' self-image and overall confidence.

A book like T*he Body Image Survival Guide For Parents* is an effective intervention in girls' negative body image because it provides excellent examples on how to handle challenges to self-esteem and positive body awareness with hands on tips and activities with real questions and answers. Warhaft-Nadler (2013) helps parents understand the challenges their children are facing and gives them the tools they need to empower their children to tune out the negative messages and focus on their strengths.

Individuals are often unaware of the impact of their behavior, particularly when it involves giving feedback on physical appearance. What may seem harmless can be severely damaging to someone else. As I have demonstrated, sociocultural factors such as peers, parents and media influences are possible contributors to the development of body dissatisfaction. It is crucial to understand the importance of family and the role family plays on young women's body image. Thus a family-level intervention like *The Body Image Survival Guide for Parents is* one effective approach to addressing adolescent girls' body image anxieties.

Beautiful You: A Daily Guide to Radical Self-Acceptance is extremely powerful and a great start for individuals to work on their self-acceptance. This book draws on self-awareness, creativity and mind-body connections. The author accurately describes

Beautiful You as a practical and inspirational tool for realizing a healthy self- image through championing one's own emotional and physical well-being. (Molinary, 2010). This individual intervention, written in the self-help tradition, quiets individuals and moves them to find clarity. It encourages readers to develop their own insights through compassionate observation and careful execution.

As stated earlier, self-help books can be dangerous if they are inaccurate, fail to separate an author's opinion from research findings, and contain suggestions that do not recognize gender and diversity issues. While the use of self-help books can be used as a way for women to discover themselves and teach them effective ways of being, they must also be used with care.

A large city like New York recognizing that girls as young as six years old struggle with body image issues, represents a major step forward for feminism. The New York City Girls Project is a body image intervention applied at the cultural level, which seems to have all the elements of a successful campaign: goals, strategy and research. This mediated campaign encourages the use of social media by inspiring girls to post pictures of themselves doing activities that allow them to be considered beautiful yet natural, healthy, and active. The campaign specifically chose stories and pictures of girls of various ages, races and sizes; so that girls who rode the subway and viewed the posters would see reflected back at them girls who looked like them saying "I'm beautiful" explained Dockterman (pg. 1).

This campaign takes a major step forward in bringing this critical issue into the community. Adults, children, and adolescents who view the posters and images

throughout the city will hopefully gain awareness about female adolescents' bodies and

do less criticizing and more supporting. The accompanying innovative curriculum, *Full of*

Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health and Leadership, is an

outstanding program for healthy growing girls in middle schools. The NYC Girls Project

has done a great deal to raise awareness in the community about such an important

issue. As I have reported, all participants from my focus group agreed that public

awareness plays a major role in bringing attention to positive body image. Overall, the

focus group made it obvious how early individuals recognize their body image, how

important families and cultures are on one's body image, and that public health

campaigns would be most effective in moving forward.

These three interventions include tools and techniques for both young females

and families to use in improving the self-image and self-concept of adolescent females.

This process, however, cannot be done by one specific side of the equation. Improving

the body image of adolescent females is a process that will take time and hard work. It

must incorporate all aspects of a girl's life and include the family, institutions like the

media, schools, the beauty industries, as well as girls themselves. Young girls need to

want to address these issues and believe in themselves, and to do so with the support of

family members, friends, loved ones and the community. The process of improving

one's body image calls for a multifaceted approach.

Body image concerns have been an ongoing concern for females in the US for

over a hundred years. It is something that all individuals suffer from at one point or

another. It is imperative that we understand the circumstances and necessary actions to

improving one's body image. These three interventions are excellent examples to use and learn from in promoting the self-concept of healthy body image, and improving young girls' overall confidence. With the three interventions as a premise and a guide, we can strengthen girls so that they will be ready to deal with the challenges they may face from society and our culture. We can encourage emotional toughness and self-protection. We can support and guide adolescent girls. We can work together to build a culture that is less complicated and more nurturing, less violent and sexualized, and more encouraging and supportive.

Appendix: Positive Body Image Intervention Focus Group Questions

1. When did you first recognize your body image?

2. How has your family influenced your body image and the way you feel about yourself?

3. What are the pros and cons of turning to a self-help book rather than another form of help or advice?

4. Do you find that public awareness plays a role in bringing attention to positive body image?

5. Looking to the future, if you had the power and authority to aid in promoting a positive body image, what would you do?

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