

ADOLESCENTS, BODY IMAGE, AND MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULA:
HOW AND WHY SCHOOLS SHOULD CHALLENGE “STANDARDS” OF APPEARANCE

By

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To my Mom and Dad

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
ABSTRACT	8
CHAPTER	
1 BODY IMAGE AND THE ADOLESCENT GIRL: A LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Factors Affecting Adolescent Girls’ Body Image.....	10
Body Image, Patriarchy, and the “Cult of Femininity”	10
The Role of Families and Peers	12
Media Influences.....	13
A Case for Media Literacy	17
Implications of a Body Image Education	21
2 BODY IMAGE CURRICULUM: AN ANALYSIS	26
Curriculum Materials	26
<i>Healthy Body Image: Teaching Kids to Eat and Love Their Bodies Too!</i>	27
<i>Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health, and Leadership</i>	28
<i>Your Own Healthy Style: A Middle School Curriculum to Enhance Body Image</i>	30
Body Image Curriculum: Some Key Points.....	31
Method.....	32
Factor One: Family and Peer Support	32
Factor Two: Gender Role Satisfaction	33
Factor Three: Global and Physical Self-Esteem.....	33
Factor Four: Coping Strategies and Critical Thinking Skills.....	34
Factor Five: Holistic Wellness and Balance	34
Curriculum Analysis	36
Factor One: Family and Peer Support	36
Factor Two: Gender Role Satisfaction	38
Factor Three: Global and Physical Self-Esteem	42
Factor Four: Coping Strategies and Critical Thinking Skills.....	45
Factor Five: Holistic Wellness and Balance	47
Discussion.....	50
Potential Challenges to the Programs.....	52
Issues of Diversity	54

3	A PROPOSAL FOR CURRICULUM TANSFORMATION	57
	Incorporating Critical Media Literacy	58
	Integrating Body Image Concepts into the Subject Areas	60
	English/Language Arts	61
	Math.....	63
	Science.....	66
	Social Studies.....	69
	Moving Beyond the Classroom.....	72
4	CONCLUSION	76
	REFERENCES	80
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	85

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>page</u>
3-1	National Standards for Language Arts.....	62
3-2	National Standards for Mathematics.....	65
3-3	National Science Education Standards	68
3-4	National Social Studies and History Standards.....	71

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During adolescence, body image is a key issue, one that can influence self-esteem, physical and psychological health, school performance, and interpersonal relationships. Because children and adolescents spend a large portion of their time in schools, schools provide an excellent space in which to explore and challenge concepts relating to body image, especially because of the potential severe health implications. Body image curricula have been designed by organizations and individuals, but many of these programs serve as separate units or lessons, some even as isolated extracurricular activities. However, integration of body image lessons and concepts in with core subject areas, combined with infused media literacy, allows positive messages about body image to be repeated and reinforced while also being connected to subject area content and educational standards. Ultimately, integration of body image concepts into core subjects can lead to important changes and empowerment in student lives, aiding and encouraging them in the challenge against potentially harmful “norms” for appearance in society—norms that serve to dictate impossible standards and imprison groups and individuals within the demands of patriarchy.

CHAPTER 1 BODY IMAGE AND THE ADOLESCENT GIRL: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Searching through catalogues
you wish you could order
the bodies not the clothes.
(Shandler, 1999, p. 5)

For more than a century, feminist efforts have aided in supplying women with rights and equality socially, politically, and economically. These rights for women have trickled down and afforded opportunities to girls and young women that were previously prohibited. However, Naomi Wolf (1990) asserts, “As women released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it waned to carry on its work of social control” (p. 2). In spite of progress, even legislation protecting women’s rights to their own wombs, culturally imposed standards of beauty often still imprison girls and women, coercing them into conformity with constantly shifting and virtually unattainable rules.

Female bodies face unrelenting scrutiny framed by standards permeating nearly every aspect of society, including romantic relationships, friendships, clothing, entertainment, politics, food, the job market, motherhood, and education. Body dissatisfaction is the norm; expressing body satisfaction makes someone a supposed social freak. One study indicates that more than half of women 18 to 25 would rather be hit by a truck than be fat, and the primary desire for adolescent girls ages 11 to 17 is to lose weight (Maine, 2000). Perhaps most jarring, these attitudes about appearance and body dissatisfaction exist in girls as young as eight and nine years old (Grogan & Wainwright, 1992; Maine, 2000).

Adolescent and pre-adolescent girls face multiple struggles. Physically, their bodies change as they progress through puberty. Mentally, their cognition alters from concrete to abstract ways of thinking. Socially, they develop varying friendly, romantic, and sexual interests. Academically, they may transition from elementary to middle school, middle to high school, or

high school to college. They struggle to find a balance between independence from and dependence upon parents or guardians. They may find jobs, participate in sports, help care for family members, or cope with learning, physical, or mental disabilities. Among these and other issues girls face, they also receive messages from the media, family, and peers about their bodies, namely all that is “wrong” with them. Sometimes these messages take precedence, even through efforts to resist.

Factors Affecting Adolescent Girls’ Body Image

Though body image plays a crucial role in the lives of both adolescent girls and boys, the prescribed “rules” for bodies and the implications of those “rules” are often more stringent and pervasive for girls than those boys. For girls, a number of factors combine to make body image such a controlling presence. Patriarchy and the “Cult of Femininity” work together in perpetuating repressive notions for defining what it means to be “feminine” or “a woman,” cultural definitions virtually unattainable for the majority of females. Furthermore, these ideas are subtly instilled throughout Western culture and carried on through generations; girls often learn these “rules” through their families, their peers, and the media. These forces of patriarchy, family, peers, and the media continually influence or respond to each other, making it difficult to untangle the causes from the effects. Challenging one of these factors is difficult, but in order to effect real, lasting change, all of these factors must be challenged and dissected in order to alter the strict rules regarding female bodies.

Body Image, Patriarchy, and the “Cult of Femininity”

Patriarchy, and the “cult of femininity” it imposes upon girls and women, underscores all issues regarding body image. This framework establishes and perpetuates the beauty myth. According to Wolf (1990), “The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called ‘beauty’ objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to

possess women who embody it” to which she comments, “None of this is true. ‘Beauty’ is a currency system like the gold standard...it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact” (p. 2). Beliefs surrounding body image are fluid across time and culture. Specifically, I refer to contemporary, Western “standards” of body image.

In West and Zimmerman’s (1987) “Doing Gender,” the authors explain that people perform gender in accordance with (or in resistance to) certain expectations outlined by culture. Through issues related to body image, girls learn to define “female” and “feminine” and what it takes (and means) to become a “woman,” rules that often emerge subtly or overtly through the media (Currie, 1997). One of the “nonnegotiable markers of ideal femininity” is physical appearance (Adams & Bettis, 2003, p. 75), a criterion “increasingly mediated by social texts, specifically women’s magazines as a commercial medium that orchestrates women’s activities in relation to their bodies” (Currie, 1997, p. 460). These prescribed norms connecting ideal girlhood/womanhood, attractiveness, and femininity are not only disseminated through media directed for adolescents; young girls, even as young as toddlers, hear fairy tales and other stories that place a requirement and high value upon girls’ and women’s attractiveness, prescribing that “physical attractiveness is one of women’s most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain” (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 711).

In making the transition from girlhood to womanhood, accompanied by a number of potentially tumultuous changes, adolescent girls seek out ways to understand what they experience and guidance for what they should be and do. The “cult of femininity” that stipulates the “rules” for womanhood and femininity lies below the surface of generations worth of women, media, and culture (Wolf, 1990). During this transitional period, pre-adolescent and adolescent girls find guidance and answers in mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, other relatives,

peers, and the media, all of which are often influenced by or entrenched in the “cult of femininity.”

The Role of Families and Peers

Due to their direct interaction with adolescent girls, families and peers have an important influence in perceptions of body image. Comments, whether negative or positive, and behaviors by these individuals can contribute to a girls’ self-perceptions of body image (Maine, 2000; McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Ridge, 2006). Additionally, the mere existence of same-sex parents, siblings, or peers can indirectly bring about social comparison and verbalizations of body dissatisfaction (fat talk) (Britton, Martz, Bazzini, Curtin, & LeaShomb, 2006; McCabe et al., 2006). These relationships have the power to perpetuate or resist ideas about body image, but other factors interplay with these connections, challenging efforts to resist.

Parents, or parental figures, play an important role in body image for adolescent girls. McCabe et al. (2006) found that parents focus several comments toward their daughters on physical appearance, though the messages are sometimes mixed. Girls in the study reported having numerous positive messages from their mothers, but they often experienced negative messages, too, particularly pertaining to concerns about weight, specific body parts, diet, and fitness. Fathers exhibited many positive messages, and negative comments often specifically referred to weight. Grogan and Wainwright (1996) and Maine (2000) indicate that girls may absorb and even mimic their mothers’ body dissatisfaction and dieting behaviors, simply through chronic observation. Maine (2000) also mentions that, at times, girls seek acceptance and approval from their fathers, especially physically or emotionally distant fathers, through their bodies, wanting their fathers to be proud of how they look. Messages similar to those received from parents are received from siblings, with sisters described as more negative or critical, at times (McCabe et al., 2006).

Peers are an obvious and inevitable influence over adolescent girls' body image. During adolescence, peer relationships become vital and peers seem to have more relevant and accurate information about topics of social interest; thus, peer influences over body image can either supersede or reinforce messages transmitted by families. Additionally, peer acceptance is vital for most adolescents. Girls seek acceptance in both platonic and romantic circumstances, longing for inclusion, sometimes within certain groups. However, social comparisons exist more frequently among female friends and often cause girls to focus on the perceived flaws with their bodies, especially with regard to attractiveness and weight (McCabe et al., 2006).

Interestingly, McCabe et al. (2006) note that some girls make efforts to combat negative comments and social comparisons in their internal dialogue. The authors indicate that, in their study, reports of body dissatisfaction were lower than in other studies conducted previously (Keel, Fulkerson, & Leon, 1997; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001). They believe their group discussion format for interviews played a role. They suggest that "if girls are given the opportunity to discuss their body image, they are more likely to challenge the automatic negative feelings they have about their bodies, and to adopt a more positive approach" (McCabe et al., 2006, p. 419). Consequently, their research implies that in spite of negativities that may spawn from peer relationships, these relationships also have the power to help girls oppose the "standards" of beauty and carve out a place for greater acceptance of bodies, perhaps ultimately challenging the underlying structures that shape the "norms" for accepted body image in Western culture.

Media Influences

Numerous studies indicate the potent impact of media images and messages on girls' attitudes about body image (Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Currie, 1997; Tiggeman, Gardiner, & Slater, 2000; Milkie, 2002; Massoni, 2004; McCabe et al., 2006; Damico & Fuller, 2007). Media

messages are an important concern for adolescent females, often more so than for adolescent males (Tiggeman et al., 2000; McCabe et al., 2006; Damico & Fuller, 2007). Damico and Fuller (2007) note that the girls mentioned media images as one of the top two reasons for desiring thinness. In the study by McCabe et al. (2006), more than half of the girls surveyed reported receiving negative messages about bodies from the media, particularly messages indicating that they fell short of the established ideal.

Many studies on adolescent girls, body image, and the media include or are limited to the content teen magazines, particularly *Seventeen*, the most profitable, most widely circulated, and longest running (since 1944) magazine for adolescent females (Currie, 1997; Massoni, 2004).

Milkie (2002) provides an argument for why many studies concentrate on magazines:

First, magazines offer an optimal site to examine processes of critique of the feminine image because they focus explicitly on femininity and come directly defined and packaged to girls and women in the form of a tangible product...Second, the same narrow, unrealistic images of female beauty prominent in mainstream magazines are pervasive in all kinds of mainstream and specialized media, including television and film entertainment, advertising, and the Internet, and in other cultural objects such as children's books and toys. In addition, they are common cultural currency, with more than 90 percent of U. S. adolescent girls reading them at least occasionally. (p. 845)

Even so, researchers would likely agree that a variety of media, not just magazines, contribute to the way in which these images and ideas about bodies are transmitted. Films, television shows, video games, online communities, novels and stories, internet activities, advertisements, and products all aid in portraying aspects of body image. An additional part of the problem, embedded in all of these forms of media, is the role of patriarchy and the "cult of femininity," the subtle and pervasive framework crafting, nurturing, and purporting ideas about body image as, according to Wolf (1990), an effort to maintain control over females in a world in which they have managed to break the patriarchal structures in so many other ways.

Examples of girls' reactions to media images, even just in the research I am reviewing here, could easily be enumerated in an entire text. Regardless of who conducted the studies, where the studies were conducted (within a Western context), or what the ages of the girls involved in the studies were (ranging from elementary to college aged), similar themes emerged (Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Currie, 1997; Tiggeman et al., 2000; Milkie, 2002; Massoni, 2004; McCabe et al., 2006; Damico & Fuller, 2007). Women and girls in the media represented unrealistic, impractical, or impossible ideals of beauty, according to those surveyed. Female observers exhibit frustration over the supposed expectations to "fit" those molds and the pressures to appear a certain way. Even when they know certain products do not have the magic effect an ad promises, they still seem to buy, use, or want those products in hopes of the effect being true. The messages about weight conveyed in the ads imply that "you are not going to go anywhere or get anything if you're overweight" and that body size and appearance contribute to success in life (McCabe et al., 2006, p. 416). Some studies indicate that girls are not simply passive receptors of media images and messages that perpetuate the beauty myth. Grogan and Wainwright (1996), Currie (1997), and Milkie (2002) all independently indicate that girls identify portrayals of "perfect" body as unrealistic and convey frustration over the lack of more realistic and "average" females in the media.

In light of the aforementioned notion, a key question remains: If girls criticize or reject media messages and images for presenting impossible standards of beauty, why do we still need a body image education? Simply stated, the criticisms of media representations of bodies are not as clear or easily managed as, for instance, identifying the effectiveness of an advertisement. First of all, the "negotiation of realism is not dependent on simply the content of the image" and different girls could possibly "draw differing conclusions about identical ads" (Currie, 1997, p.

467). Other factors come into play that feed into certain ideologies, especially those appropriating “acceptable” femininity. For example, girls in Currie’s (1997) study rejected the overtly sexualized models in ads or ads in which the image and the product for sale did not connect, but they approved of the models in ads portraying brides and motherhood, including an ad in which a woman playing with a child was not explicitly linked with the perfume being advertised. Even among criticism of “unrealistic” bodies, the criticisms do not seem to apply to the images presented through some traditional ideas of femininity (like marriage and motherhood)—nor did the girls challenge the general value placed upon appearance. Very few girls can “critique the underlying patriarchal meanings in the texts such as the extensive focus on beauty” (Milkie, 2002, p. 842).

A second problem is the incompatibility between cognitive and emotional responses to the media. Even when they recognize the inherent problems within media portrayals, the girls follow up their critiques of media with critiques of self, often in terms of specific “problems” they perceive about their own bodies (Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Currie, 1997; Tiggeman et al., 2000; McCabe et al., 2006; Damico & Fuller 2007). Girls’ recognitions of the problem is not enough. In an interview with fourteen-year-old Abby Kaufmann, founder of the small body positive organization NoBODYs Perfect, Kaufmann commented that she recognized the problems with body image messages presented by the media but identified that these media images played a prominent role in her two-year struggle with anorexia, a struggle that later prompted her to create NoBODYs Perfect (A. Kaufmann, personal communication, June 6, 2008). Even girls who express general body satisfaction call their self-evaluations into question when facing “perfect” bodies, pinpointing, in particular, body parts (stomach, hips, thighs, butt,

etc.) considered imperfect (Tiggeman et al., 2000; McCabe et al., 2006). Furthermore, girls also indicate an interesting quandary with regard to their current versus an “ideal” weight:

When specifically asked whether their desire to be thinner meant that they were dissatisfied with their current weight, the girls’ responses were varied...the responses tended to suggest that this was not necessarily the case. Overall, the girls thought that “you might think you would be happier if you were thinner, but you are not unhappy” or “you look at the pictures and think I wish I was like that, but if you actually had a chance to be like that you would probably want to stay the same size as you are” (Tiggeman et al., 2000, p. 652).

Achieving and maintaining body satisfaction amidst a barrage of images reinforcing the idea of bodies as inherently imperfect and requiring work is a virtually impossible task for adolescent girls.

Although multiple factors connect to body image issues, media message play a significant role because they influence other factors, like peers, families, and self, and provide concrete representations of the underlying structures of patriarchy and the “cult of femininity.” Furthermore, the media pervades the lives of adolescents. Because of the tangibility and potency of media messages, the media becomes an effective starting point for exploring, understanding, and challenging ideas about body image with adolescent girls.

A Case for Media Literacy

In the aforementioned research on adolescents and body image, the influences of media images and messages are clearly powerful and pervasive. Although they do not act in isolation, these media messages play an important role in the personal lives of adolescents—a role often unaddressed in school curricula. Children and adolescents may spend, at minimum, a fourth of their day interacting with media (Scharrer, 2002/2003), including television, film, magazines, internet, music, and video games. The answer to the equation seems obvious: time spent with media plus messages about body images plus peer involvement and influence equals the need for critical media literacy curriculum in the education system. Minkel (2002) mentions that even

taking into consideration the proliferation of the media in lives of children, the United States has been sluggish in adapting—unlike Canada, whose centralized education system has more rapidly infused media literacy into the curriculum in all provinces. Media literacy involves skills needed to “read” media, understanding, analyzing, and evaluating media messages. Programs for media literacy have the goal of leading students to becoming critical viewers of media, thinking about and questioning what they see rather than taking information and ideas at face value. At a deeper level, critical media literacy education encourages students to think about who creates media and for what purposes, including examining cultural contexts, relations of power, and interactions between media and audiences or individuals (Alverman & Hagood, 2000). Research demonstrates the effectiveness of critical media literacy with regard to children/adolescents and specific aspects of media influence, such as tobacco usage (Pinkleton, Austin, Cohen, & Miller, 2003; Banerjee & Greene, 2006, 2007; Pinkleton, Weintraub Austin, Cohen, Miller, & Fitzgerald, 2007), alcohol (Austin, 2006), and violence (Scharrer & Cooks, 2006). If media literacy has been effective with other media influences, it stands to reason that it would also be effective with issues relating to body image.

Alvermann and Hagood (2000) indicate that children and adolescents are not passive recipients of information, especially with regard to the internet which often allows unedited and unfiltered information at their immediate disposal. As a result, Damico and Fuller (2007) state that instruction of critical media literacy must place teachers in the role of facilitators, utilizing the students’ knowledge and preferences for certain media in helping them develop critical perspectives. Scharrer (2002/2003) identifies two approaches to critical literacy: the impact mediation approach and the cultural studies approach. The impact mediation approach is an intervention model that focuses on the negative messages sent by the media in an effort to

decrease the media's influence on students. This approach involves a didactic model that places the teacher as the bearer of knowledge and only allows students' limited involvement in the educational exchange, which Scharrer suggests has only limited success in modifying students' cognition of media messages. However, the cultural studies approach embraces students' own media interests and considers both positive and negative aspects in helping students develop a critical eye with which to examine the multiple facets of media. The goal of this approach is not to teach what is "bad" about the media and try to nudge students toward some sort of anti-media epiphany; instead, the goal of this approach is to recognize the significant role media plays in the lives of students and utilize that to develop critical thinking skills. In general, the purpose of media literacy is not to create some magical epiphany; instead, media literacy can help students understand the role that the media plays in their lives and develop skills for critical analysis both in what media messages convey and omit (Scharrer, 2002/2003).

Though media literacy education will not likely generate sudden and radical change, its impact can be potent. Scharrer (2002/2003) notes that individuals' thoughts and behaviors can alter after only one media literacy unit, though sometimes the effects do not materialize immediately and require a lapse of time. In a study of media literacy and body image curriculum with fourth grade girls, Fuller, Damico, and Rodgers (2004) integrated media literacy, body image issues, and health education in order to try to help the girls develop critical perspectives toward body image and media messages about bodies. As indicated by Scharrer, the girls did not demonstrate a drastic transformation, but they did demonstrate more discriminating and reflective thought processes in their responses than their peers in the control group, even five months following the study. In a college setting, studies conducted by Rabak-Wagener, Eickhoff-Shemek, and Kelly-Vance (1998) and Chambers and Alexander (2007) further indicate

that a six-and-a-half hour, multi-day unit and a one-day lesson, respectively, can impact body image perspectives on college-aged women.

With studies marking the effectiveness of media literacy, the question remains as to why media literacy does not occupy a more prominent space in the American education system. From my own and knowledge of others' teaching experiences, the Florida state academic standards for secondary Language Arts, for example, that address media literacy (under the strands of "Viewing" and "Listening") are often limitedly addressed, if at all. One reason for this omission might be ignorance in knowing how to effectively address media literacy in the classroom, with only a few practical resources available to guide implementation (Stevens, 2001; Minkel, 2002; Scharrer, 2002/2003). Another, and perhaps more salient, reason for the lack of media literacy is the difficulty in trying to infuse media literacy with other instruction due to time limitations, instead allocating all instructional time to focus on skills directly encompassed by the state's standardized Reading assessment. Unfortunately, this instructional hierarchy dichotomizes learning into the relevant or the extra-curricular, eliminating students' real world experiences from the learning process. Goodson and Norton-Meier (2003) present fictional case studies indicating the value students place on media and peer influences over the "high culture" of classic literature taught in the classroom, materials they struggle to try to incorporate into their own lives. This division creates a vast problem in a space that should foster learning and critical thinking skills. Alvermann and Hagood (2000) clearly describe the problem with this division:

This stripping of self at the classroom's threshold, of one's life outside of school, includes popular culture interests that are viewed as leisure activity and irrelevant to academic pursuit...Popular culture's status relegated as a leisure activity in schools shows how the spaces of school discourse organize and partition students' lives such that their personal interests are apparent in spaces associated with body and pleasure: in lunchrooms, on playgrounds, or through unsanctioned ways in classrooms...in-school literacies associated with the canon...deemed "high" culture pushes students' popular culture out of the instructional realm (200).

In offering little or no media literacy in the curriculum, educators neglect to address an important factor and tap a key resource in the development of children and adolescents.

Media literacy is a vital element in developing critical awareness of and influencing thoughts and behaviors relating to body image. Criticism alone of media images will not solve the problem. Vandereycken (2006) remarks that “wish[ing] that celebrities and models had a more ‘realistic’ shape...remains a bit utopian” (p. 5). Attempting to change the media’s representations of bodies or the ideologies associated with body image, body size, and gender and bodies remains a complicated and challenging task, especially considering the pervasiveness of such images and ideas (Chambers & Alexander, 2007). Thus, effective change requires helping children and adolescents, not just girls and young women, develop the critical eye toward observing and evaluating media messages. However, despite the powerful influence of the media on children and adolescents, media literacy alone cannot solve the problems with body image issues. In order for a body image curriculum to be most effective, it needs to combine critical media literacy, critical thinking skills, and health education, along with fostering effective communication skills with peers and families. Additionally, body image education does not need to be some segregated addition to the curriculum; it can be infused with other curricula in language arts, science, social studies, health, physical education, and other courses in order to present a multidimensional way in which to address body image issues.

Implications of a Body Image Education

Body image is more than just a sociocultural issue. It can be linked to serious physiological and psychological concerns that can have severe, chronic, and even life-threatening results for adolescents. While schools may hesitate or refuse to address body image concerns in the curriculum, perceiving it as unnecessary or as an added burden, the mental,

emotional, and physical issues related to body dissatisfaction can play out in the classroom and ultimately affect health and performance.

Negative body image perspectives have been associated with a myriad of health-related problems. Girls, adolescent females, and women tend to associate thinness with health (Kater, 2005), an inaccurate relationship that often leads females toward dieting. Up to 70 percent of adolescent females admit to having experimented with dieting at some level (Nagel & Jones, 1992; Maine, 2000; Daee et al., 2002; Kater, 2005), and body dissatisfaction and dieting can even begin as early as age seven or eight (Kostanski & Gullone, 1999; Kater, 2005). While dieting can be healthy when conducted for the right reasons and under the right conditions, the negative effects tend to outweigh the positives, especially since people often diet improperly (Daee et al., 2002). At the most extreme ends, dieting can morph into eating disorders; approximately 6 percent of adolescent and young adult females are diagnosed with an eating disorder (Kater, 2005). Physically, dieting can result in delays in growth and puberty (Kostanski & Gullone, 1999; Daee et al., 2002), an increased risk of adult obesity (Daee et al., 2002; Kater, 2005), impaired cognitive functioning (Kostanski & Gullone, 1999), a loss of natural feelings of hunger which tell us when our bodies need food (Kater, 2005), and impaired function of organs, such as the heart and kidneys (Kotanski & Gullone, 1999; Daee et al., 2002). Dieting behaviors have also been linked to smoking (Wiseman, Turco, Sunday, & Halmi, 1997; Daee et al., 2002), alcohol and drug use, school delinquency, and poor school performance (Daee et al., 2002). Furthermore, dieting is sometimes even connected with depression (Kater, 2005; Frisén, 2007) and, at the most extreme, suicide attempts (Daee et al., 2002). In some cases, dieting, poor body image, and perceived weight issues link to risky sexual behaviors, such as unprotected or intoxicated sex, leading to unwanted pregnancy, sexually-transmitted infections, and HIV (Daee

et al., 2002; Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, & Davies, 2002; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Lust, 2005). If up to 70 percent of adolescent females are potentially at risk of some of the aforementioned consequences, how can schools deny a role in helping girls develop more positive body image perceptions and associated healthy habits?

Beyond the serious physical consequences of dieting, negative body image perceptions have a connection to underlying values. Body fat wrongly implies negative attributes, such as laziness, lack of self-control, unattractiveness, and badness, despite the need for fat in healthy female development (Kostanski & Gullone, 1999; Kater, 2005). Additionally, despite the vital role of body fat in the proper progression through puberty, body types deviating from the thin ideal are often perceived as violating norms of femininity (Nagel & Jones, 1992; Brumberg, 1997; Maine, 2000; LeBesco, 2004; Kater, 2005). Even though some variation exists among racial and ethnic groups with regard to body image perceptions, girls and adolescents, regardless of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, experience the negative attributes for certain body types and the physical consequences of dieting in order to meet certain “standards” of beauty (Nagel & Jones, 1992; Story, French, Resnick, & Blum, 1994; Kater, 2005).

In an effort to help educate girls on eating disorders and elevate self-esteem, various programs have been implemented to try and counteract some body image concerns. Programs that have focused on educating predominantly about eating disorders or on negative food-related concerns often produce ineffective or even harmful consequences (O’Dea & Abraham, 1999; O’Dea, 2000, 2002; Steiner-Adair et al., 2002). O’Dea (2000) suggests,

Changing the focus from highlighting negative, problem-based issues to helping young people build self-esteem and enjoy healthy eating and regular enjoyable physical activity without developing a fear of food is the first step in establishing positive nutrition messages and school-based education programs which will do no harm (p. 128).

Ultimately, by focusing on self-esteem, positive body image, and improved attitudes about health, both physical and mental, curricula and education programs can effectively challenge negative or harmful attitudes about body image.

Following O’Dea’s suggestion, I will further explore body image curriculum and how it can be effectively integrated in schools in an effort to challenge the cultural “standard” of beauty and promote healthy attitudes and behaviors among young adolescents. In Chapter 2, I will provide an analysis of three different curriculum pieces. Utilizing a five-factor framework for body image curriculum (Choate, 2007), I will examine the following curriculum pieces for their effectiveness in meeting each factor as well as their practical applicability and prospective role in addressing certain diversity issues: *Healthy Body Image: Teaching Kids to Eat and Love Their Bodies Too!* (Kater, 2005), *Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health, and Leadership* (Steiner-Adair & Sjostrom, 2006), and *Your Own Healthy Style: A Middle-School Curriculum to Enhance Body Image* (Stein & Bark, 2006). After the analysis, in Chapter 3 I will offer a proposal for how aspects of the three curriculum pieces in addition to other ideas can be integrated into the core subject areas—Language Arts/English, Math, Science, and Social Studies—to provide a broader and more balanced attention to body image and related health concerns without adding an additional burden to educators and students. In order to challenge the cultural “standards” of appearance that place immense pressure on and instigate dangerous behaviors in adolescents, the knowledge must be conveyed as relevant and vital. While a separate course or extracurricular program may benefit students in acquiring improved self-esteem, body image perception, and health consciousness, the isolation of such issues may make them accessible only to certain groups. By incorporating body image and health issues into other curricula, the benefits can extend to more students in an effort to change an unjust and

detrimental “standard” placing physical appearance above social, emotional, intellectual, and physical health.

CHAPTER 2 BODY IMAGE CURRICULUM: AN ANALYSIS

Curriculum Materials

For my analysis, I have selected three different curricula that all address body image but in different ways. In searching for body image curriculum, certain titles kept appearing again and again. Kathy Kater's *Healthy Body Image: Teaching Kids to Eat and Love Their Bodies Too!* emerged repeatedly, in addition to some other titles produced by the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA). Of all the options offered by the NEDA, I selected *Healthy Body Image* because of its focus on upper elementary school students, children at the very beginning stages of adolescence, of all genders and in a variety of subjects. The NEDA also offers another curriculum piece called *Girl Power!* which addresses body image issues for girls ages nine to thirteen. However, I only wanted to utilize one work by the NEDA and selected the one designed for schools. Furthermore, I selected another piece designed specifically for early adolescent females that came up numerous times while searching for curriculum—*Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health, and Leadership* by Catherine Steiner-Adair and Lisa Sjostrom from Harvard Medical School. Designed for small groups of girls in an extracurricular environment, the curriculum shares themes with *Healthy Body Image*, but it also addresses some girl-specific health and body image issues. The third curriculum, *Your Own Healthy Style: A Middle School Curriculum to Enhance Body Image*, was created specifically through the combined efforts of the Montana Office of Public Instruction and Montana State University—Bozeman for implementation in Montana public schools. *Healthy Body Image*, though designed for school implementation, spawned from a private organization while *Your Own Healthy Style* was generated by and for a specific school system. All three pieces address

similar topics and similar age groups (pre- and early adolescents), but each piece addresses the issues with a slightly different focus or in varying ways.

Healthy Body Image: Teaching Kids to Eat and Love Their Bodies Too!

Published by the NEDA, *Healthy Body Image*, created by psychotherapist Kathy J. Kater, focuses on body image and weight issues. Its publication followed a 1996 report by the U. S. Department of Health Task Force on Eating Disorders that called for curricula addressing eating disorder concerns for upper elementary grades (Kater, 2005). Grounded in research on body image, adolescent health, and eating disorders, the curriculum is designed primarily for preadolescent girls *and* boys, approximately fourth through sixth grades, but can adapt for grades through high school. The program contains ten lessons, each recommended for a specific subject, such as literature or science/health, and all the lessons thematically connect between disciplines. Additionally, each lesson contains lesson objectives, background information, teaching outcomes, key concepts and vocabulary, materials list, lesson script, activities, and any necessary handouts. Furthermore, in this second edition of the curriculum (used here), the author has also made changes to make the book more user-friendly, based on teacher recommendations. Some of the changes include a softbound cover, rather than a three-ring binder, and perforated supplemental pages which can remove easily to make photocopies or overheads.

Healthy Body Image is crafted for whole-school implementation. The author promotes involving the whole school in the curriculum. Even if the lessons are not being taught across the board, she suggests all teachers read the “Background for Educators” (p. xix-xxxvii) to familiarize themselves with the curriculum’s key concepts so they can reinforce consistent ideas about health and body image throughout the school. The “Background for Educators” offers justification for the program based upon academic research conducted on body image, child and adolescent health, and eating disorders. Additionally, the “Background for Educators” includes a

model for the program and strategies for teaching the curriculum. The author also includes information for parent involvement and staff development as well as resources for teachers in order to enhance the impact of the healthy, body-positive messages presented in the lessons.

Although published by the NEDA, the curriculum does not focus on eating disorders. Some aspects address eating disorder prevention, but the curriculum primarily more concentrates on attacking some of the central causes of broader body image issues, such as media representations of bodies, body image history, health, and body functions, with the goal of developing healthy, body-positive knowledge and habits in children. According to the author, the overall purpose of the curriculum, both in the original and current editions, is “to inoculate children with information, perspectives, values, and behavioral competencies that will help them resist the primary risk factors for the full spectrum of body image, eating, nutrition, fitness, and weight problems” (Kater, 2005, p. xxxi).

Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health, and Leadership

Full of Ourselves was created by Catherine Steiner-Adair, a clinical psychologist and school consultant, and Lisa Sjostrom, a veteran teacher and curriculum writer, at the Harvard Medical School. Designed for young adolescent girls in middle school, the curriculum includes eight lessons addressing issues such as body politics, health, media messages, relationships, self-esteem, and assertiveness. Each lesson in Phase 1 requires about an hour to complete and contains objectives, lesson scripts, core and supplemental activities, necessary activity handouts, marginal notes and suggestions offered by previous facilitators or group members, and homework. The homework for the lessons, dubbed “Call to Action,” offer three activities for the girls to do between group meetings that allow for deeper thinking about and application of the issues discussed in the meeting. Phase 2 of the program consists of a mentoring aspect that follows completion of all curriculum units. In the “Throw Your Weight Around!” sessions, the

girls now become mentors, leading third, fourth, and fifth grade girls through different activities in a compacted version of the *Full of Ourselves* curriculum.

The curriculum is designed as an extracurricular activity, either drawing students periodically from a class to participate or holding meetings outside of school hours. The curriculum can also infuse with community programs, religious establishments, summer camps, or other arenas in which groups of girls gather with a common focus. However, the authors also note that the messages put forth by the curriculum are “more effective when administered grade-wide rather than to a select subset of girls within a given grade,” citing the widespread environmental impact on girl and school culture (Steiner-Adair & Sjostrom, 2005, xi).

In addition to its focus on body image, *Full of Ourselves* focuses on empowering young adolescent girls. The curriculum encourages girls to look beyond body perceptions to find their inner strengths and identify role models other than media idols. The authors posit that challenging girls to “walk the talk” through completing the “Call to Action” activities and mentoring younger girls in the “Throw Your Weight Around!” session help girls become more proactive and assertive, allowing them think critically and voice themselves when addressing issues beyond body image—including their own health, education, and safety.

Like *Healthy Body Image*, *Full of Ourselves* is grounded in research on adolescent health and body image. The curriculum was designed based upon

features presumed to be effective from existing programs (e.g. a focus on esteem-building and a hands-on, experiential approach to learning) with three distinctive additions: (1) a strong feminist, sociopolitical perspective... (2) an emphasis on translating knowledge and awareness into personal and public action, and (3) a mentoring component (Steiner-Adair et al., 2002, p. 402-403).

Twenty-schools schools, public and private, in New England and a whole school district in Tulsa, Oklahoma, utilized the program in the study over a five-year period (Steiner-Adair & Sjostrom, 2006). The results indicated that the curriculum helped “effect and sustain positive

changes” specifically with regard to changes in knowledge, changes in weight-related body esteem, and risk factors for eating disorders (Steiner-Adair et al., 2002). The final product included additional features perceived as necessary from the research results, such as the “Call to Action” homework and advice and comments from research participants to assist future program facilitators. Although the program assists in the prevention of eating disorders, it is more concerned with developing strong, healthy adolescent females who evaluate themselves and others based upon intellect, strength, and personality rather than physical appearance.

Your Own Healthy Style: A Middle School Curriculum to Enhance Body Image

With support from the Federal Team Nutrition funds from the U. S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service, *Your Own Healthy Style* was created by Mary Stein and Katie Bark of Montana State University-Bozeman in conjunction with the Montana Office of Public Instruction. The curriculum was specifically designed for implementation in Montana middle schools and aligns with state education standards in health and media literacy. Currently, Montana has over 140,000 students enrolled in 830 schools across 51 districts, and 241 of those schools are middle or junior high schools. Montana ranks thirty-fifth in the U.S. with families in poverty, at 18.2%, and thirtieth in students on free or reduced lunch, with 34.5% of students participating. The racial/ethnic makeup of the schools consists of 84% White, 11.4% American Indian, 2.5% Hispanic, 1% Black, 0.9% Asian, and 0.2% Pacific Islander students. Seven Indian Reservations and twelve tribal nations exist within the state, lending to the significant American Indian population and a special Indian Education division within the school system (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2009, <http://www.opi.state.mt.us/>). The Health Enhancement Division of the school system addresses a variety of health-related issues that state and national studies have indicated Montana students engage in or are at risk for, including improper diet, lack of physical activity, risky sexual activity, and chronic disease. Half of the Health

Enhancement Division's programs center on nutrition and physical health. *Your Own Healthy Style* falls under the Team Nutrition Program, a federally funded program to promote nutrition and physical health education (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2009, www.opi.mt.gov/Health/Index.html).

The curriculum unit contains three lessons that span seven fifty-minute class periods. In addition to a brief introduction for teachers explaining the need for body image curriculum with this specific age group, each lesson includes objectives, materials list, procedure, additional lesson-focused background information for teachers, and student handouts. Each lesson addresses a different aspect of body image: definitions and historical context, media literacy, and health/nutrition.

Your Own Healthy Style was specifically designed for school-wide implementation in health classes and, though created for Montana middle schools, can likely be tailored to other states by addressing similar educational standards. Because of its school-wide purpose, it aims at both young adolescent girls and boys in middle school. Although the introduction cites concerns with higher rates of younger adolescents and eating disorders, the curriculum focuses more on broader issues of health and body image.

In addition to the lessons, the curriculum unit includes resources for educators and parents. Resources for teachers consist of websites for programs and organizations providing additional knowledge and options for lesson extension. For parents, the curriculum offers tips for supporting the positive messages presented in the curriculum at home and additional resources, including some overlap with the teacher resources.

Body Image Curriculum: Some Key Points

When considering a curriculum driven toward body image and adolescents, some important factors must be kept in mind. Body image curriculum should address the physical and

emotional changes students can expect to face during adolescence. Students need to be given information and strategies for attaining for nutrition, physical activity, and general wellness. Media messages and cultural standards regarding physical appearance should be included. Furthermore, the curricula should focus on promoting positive elements rather than acting as a campaign rallying against the negative aspects of health and body image (O’Dea & Abraham, 1999; O’Dea, 2000, 2002; Steiner-Adair et al., 2002; Kater, 2005; Steiner-Adair & Sjostrom, 2006).

Method

In this examination of body image curriculum, I will conduct a content analysis on the three pieces of body image curricula: Kater’s (2005) *Healthy Body Image*, Steiner-Adair and Sjostrom’s (2006) *Full of Ourselves*, and Stein and Bark’s (2006) *Your Own Healthy Style*. Each of the curriculum pieces will be analyzed according to a five-factor framework created by Laura Hensley Choate, a professor in Counselor Education at Louisiana State University since 1999 (LSU College of Education Faculty and Staff, 2006), as an outline of strategies for school counselors addressing body image resilience with adolescent girls. Following is a description of each of the five protective factors, including a summary of strategies.

Factor One: Family and Peer Support

Family and peers play an important role in an adolescent girl’s body image in that these people can foster positive or negative attitudes and offer grounds for behavior modeling, whether healthy or harmful, and can act as sources of social comparison. A supportive and positive family atmosphere, particularly with regard to the maternal figure, can instill affirming messages and help to limit negative body image perceptions. Positive peer group interactions can also help decrease negative body image perceptions, especially when bullying and teasing, particularly regarding body image, are absent. Overall, a strong, open support network can allow for positive

body image. Strategies for achieving this include educating and involving parents, informing students, families, and school staff about the dangers of dieting and steps for healthy eating, restricting discussion of eating disorders, creating a low tolerance atmosphere in homes and in schools (including among teachers) for teasing about bodies, and helping girls define and locate positive peer groups, specifically avoiding situations in which individuals engage in judgments, comparisons, and negative talk about bodies.

Factor Two: Gender Role Satisfaction

Two aspects of gender role socialization impact girls and body image issues. Girls learn through societal messages that they are responsible for establishing and maintaining relationships, romantic or platonic, which lead to girls judging their own self-worth according to the success of relationships and the approval of others. Additionally, girls receive messages defining femininity or what it means to become a “woman,” and the messages can be sometimes conflict. Frustrations arise in trying to fulfill these responsibilities and mixed messages, and girls attempt to find some sense of control by regulating their bodies, since thinness generally plays a role in both aspects of gender socialization. Strategies for combating these messages include educating girls on the physical and psychological changes that accompany puberty, helping girls express rather than repress their thoughts and feelings (including activities such as assertiveness training, conflict resolution, and maintaining personal power), challenging gender stereotypes, and developing an acceptance of body diversity among both girls *and* boys.

Factor Three: Global and Physical Self-Esteem

Body image becomes a central part of self-esteem for adolescent girls. Two key aspects help to enhance physical self-esteem: physical activity and realistic expectations. Participation in physical activity, not necessarily sports, can help girls improve their physical health and fitness, increase energy and stamina, and feel better about themselves. However, girls must be monitored

so that physical activity does not become an unhealthy addiction or function solely as a way to lose weight. In conjunction, if girls use physical activity as a way in which to improve their health and fitness, they must also establish realistic expectations for what physical activity can do for their bodies. Strategies for promoting positive self-esteem include encouraging participation in a variety of extracurricular activities, mentoring as a way to transmit healthy body image messages and discourage negative messages, redefining beauty to broaden the physical aspects and include other non-appearance related attributes, promoting healthy and enjoyable physical activity, and focusing girls on their positive qualities, both internal and external.

Factor Four: Coping Strategies and Critical Thinking Skills

Girls need to develop coping strategies and critical thinking skills in order to analyze and evaluate sociocultural messages about body image. Developing strong personal values and independence in making critical values-based, informed decisions requires important effective thinking and coping strategies. Critical media literacy also plays a vital role. A media literacy program help challenge negative ideas about body image has four key components: identifying, analyzing, resisting, and attempting to change harmful cultural messages (Choate, 2007).

Strategies for developing coping and critical thinking skills include helping girls develop and maintain a personal values system, integrating critical media literacy into multiple disciplines to reinforce positive messages, educating girls about the history of body image, evaluating media messages for both helpful and harmful messages about bodies, and advocating for interested girls to become involved in a media activism program.

Factor Five: Holistic Wellness and Balance

In order to fully develop a positive self-image, girls must look beyond their bodies. Some adolescent girls often feel their self-worth intrinsically tied to their physical appearance. Instead,

girls need to craft their self-worth on a multidimensional basis that includes all aspects of identity, including the social, emotional, spiritual, and physical (Choate, 2007). Strategies for fostering a more well-rounded self-perception include aligning girls with people they spiritually relate to that can help foster their spiritual growth, maintaining a journal focusing on the positive aspects of their lives, helping girls maintain physical wellness through proper nutrition, sleep, and fitness, mentoring girls in both academic and extracurricular activities to foster positive development in non-appearance related parts of life, developing leisure activities that focus on enjoyable activities that allow girls to express themselves and gain confidence in their abilities, fostering social competence, and finding support networks of peers, family, or other individuals that have positive influence in their lives.

Choate's (2007) Body Image Resilience Model, though designed for school counselors, also applies to a body image curriculum analysis because it delineates specific areas necessary to address, areas that are often addressed in research on adolescent girls and body image: family and peer support (McCabe et al., 2006), gender role satisfaction (Grogran & Wainwright, 1996; Currie, 1997; Milkie, 2002; Adams & Bettis, 2003; Baker-Sperry & Grauerholtz, 2003; Massoni, 2004), global and physical self-esteem (Britton, et al, 2006; Heldman, 2008), coping strategies and critical thinking skills (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Tiggemann et al., 2000; Minkel, 2002; Scharrer, 2002/2003; Austin, 2006; Chambers & Alexander, 2007; Damico & Fuller, 2007), and holistic wellness and balance (Maine, 2000; Fuller et al., 2004). Specifically, Choate's model proposes "five protective factors that contribute to girls' abilities to resist sociocultural pressures regarding thinness," and Choate indicates that "the most promising programs incorporate protective factors that build on girls' strengths, promote resilience, and buffer them from the development of body dissatisfaction and subsequent disordered eating practices" (Choate, 2007,

p. 317-318). In the next section, I examine each of the curricula in relation to the five factors. I identify the lessons and activities as aligning with the various factors and evaluate them in terms of the extent to which they address each of the factors. Following the analysis, I further discuss issues of practicality and diversity relevant to the programs individually and as whole, ultimately presenting thoughts to consider if implementing a body image curriculum in a school.

Curriculum Analysis

Factor One: Family and Peer Support

All three curriculum pieces both encourage and offer resources for family support, recognizing the importance of the family in an adolescent's life and the necessity for concepts to be reinforced at home to sustain lasting change.

Healthy Body Image recommends that schools have a presentation for parents at the start of the unit, offering parents important knowledge and strategies for reinforcing the concepts at home. This can also serve as a question-answer session between teachers knowledgeable about the program and families seeking information. Recognizing that such presentations may not always be possible or that some families may not attend, the author also includes a letter for parents in the appendix (p.180). The letter includes the program's mission, basic components, companion materials for parents, and encouragement for dialogue about the curriculum activities at home. Additionally, the author includes Home Education Slips (p. 209-215) so that students may take these notes home following the unit introduction, each of the ten lessons, and the unit conclusion, notifying parents of classroom activities. Each of the Home Education Slips states the theme of the day's lesson and requests that parents ask their children to talk about the day's lessons, and they should be signed and returned to class the next day.

Full of Ourselves strongly suggests that program facilitators hold a parent orientation prior to beginning the program. The parent orientation can offer information about the program

and even give parents a chance to participate in a couple of the activities and ask any questions they might have. The authors include a “10 Tips for Parents—How Best to Support Full of Ourselves at Home” handout listing strategies for parents to reinforce the curriculum’s concepts at home (p. 101), a sample parent letter announcing and describing the program (p.102), and a sample letter for program updates (p. 103). At the end of Unit 8, the final unit, one of the supplemental activities includes having the girls plan and execute a Moms’ Session in which they can basically teach a condensed version of the units, with some activities, to their mothers (or other prominent female figures in their lives). Additionally, the authors encourage the group to arrange a celebration night for families, following Phase 1, in which the girls share their knowledge and lead their families in favorite activities from the various sessions.

Your Own Healthy Style includes a parent handout that consists of strategies for supporting positive body image at home (p. 54) and a list of resources for parents (p. 55). Although the handout lists effective strategies for understanding and appreciating body diversity, eating healthy, discussing media messages, and communicating with children, the curriculum does not include any actions for involving parents in the school community.

Although all the curricula endeavor to engage parents at some level, some gaps still remain. All three attempt to reach parents by, at the very least, sending informational materials home. The strongest way to engage parents is by having them actively involved, by utilizing orientation and activity nights or encouraging discussion of the concepts at home. Having parents involved in school-based activities allows the concepts addressed in the curricula to be detailed, discussed, interpreted, and even questioned. However, even sending some basic information home allows for some level of outreach. By offering parents knowledge about body image, they

can hopefully become effective supporters of their children and reinforcements of positive body image ideas and behaviors.

All three curriculum pieces, because they center around schools or groups within schools, intently focus on peer relationships. Both *Healthy Body Image* and *Your Own Healthy Style* are designed for classroom implementation, thereby addressing both girls and boys with regard to body image. By fostering a school-wide approach, the messages about body image can disseminate to all students and can attempt to more effectively challenge sociocultural ideals of body image. On the other hand, *Full of Ourselves* is recommended for use with smaller groups of girls, numbering less than fifteen, but encourages schools to implement the curriculum with *all* girls in a school or grade level. Although the authors recognize that boys may also have concerns with body image, the curriculum is specifically tailored to girls to encourage open communication, help girls develop their own identities, and focus on aspects of girl power, such as assertiveness and leadership. Although all three curricula foster a more accepting and less appearance-based environment, *Full of Ourselves* also works to create a tightly knit support network of girls sharing similar goals. However, this network is easier to foster in a small, self-selected group than in a regular classroom setting. If teachers or, even more potently, entire schools create an open, honest environment in which there is zero tolerance for disparaging words and messages, perhaps a similar solidarity can develop without forming specialized student groups.

Factor Two: Gender Role Satisfaction

Healthy Body Image contains four lessons that address gender socialization and related issues. Lesson 3 focuses on puberty. In the lesson, students have a booklet of information, notes where they fill in the blanks with key words or phrases in the class lecture/discussion, that outline specific puberty-related information. The booklet includes general questions about

puberty, changes that occur for both girls and boys, and the role of fat in changing bodies (p. 53-62). In order to understand the normal changes bodies go through, the lesson also asks students to consider how their bodies changed from birth to age five and from age five to their current age (p. 63). By considering the changes over the course of life, children will have a better context for understanding changes that occur during puberty. Lesson 4 addresses genetics and the role they play in determining certain physical and skill- or talent-based characteristics. A chart provides a medium for students to think about their characteristics and from whom in their family they may have inherited these characteristics (p. 74). The author also includes an adaptation for students who may not know any or many of their predecessors, allowing them to imagine their ancestry based on what they already know about themselves. This information is then used to address the genetic aspect of weight and how it contributes to natural body diversity. Lesson 5 carries on ideas presented in Lesson 4 but extends the discussion into fat prejudice and body diversity. The lesson addresses influences of fatness or thinness, attempting to dispel myths of fatness by identifying how food, metabolism, genetics, and activity level can all play a role—and how being “fat” does not necessarily mean that one overeats or maintains an inactive lifestyle. One portion of the lesson asks students to consider the physical diversity among their group of friends and note what their friends eat for lunch, indicating that they likely have similar food intake but may have varied body shapes and sizes, and encouraging them to notice natural body diversity. Lesson 10 has students address role models, mentioning how some people who are identified as role models could actually be more harmful than helpful. The author includes the story of “The Ugly Duckling” here and analogizes role model comparisons by asking, “If apples compared themselves to oranges, how would they feel about being apples?” (p. 169), noting the detriment that comes with comparing the self to impossible role models. One activity at the end of this

lesson asks children to choose two role models and identify at least five admirable qualities of each person; if the child cannot come up with five qualities, they need to identify a different model (p. 172). After identifying their role models, the children can then think about how they feel when they draw social comparisons between themselves and these models. These comparisons allow them to analyze how people they consider positive role models align with cultural gender stereotypes.

In the *Full of Ourselves* curriculum, all or part of six units address gender socialization. In Unit 1, a freewrite asks students to think about “A time I felt really confident and powerful,” and a discussion following allows girls to think about how their moment of feeling “confident and powerful” made them feel about being *in* their bodies—not just about their bodies in general (p. 7). Journals like this one work to help challenge gender stereotypes by allowing girls to consider their own strength and identity apart from rigid cultural definitions of women’s appearance. Unit 2 builds on this by having girls think about five role models in their lives, specifically NOT “movie stars or TV characters” (p. 15), and two traits they admire about each role model. They write the names and traits of their role models on paper tree leaves and then attach the leaves to a Tree of Strength in which the girls share their role models with each other. Following this activity, girls identify positive traits about themselves, ultimately adding their own names to the Tree of Strength. Unit 3 contains two activities that ask the girls to consider fat stereotyping. In one activity, the facilitator reads two descriptions of different women, one beautiful and well dressed the other unattractive by society’s standards, and asks the girls to list both positive and negative words to describe each woman and her life. Subsequently, girls discuss assumptions made about women based on nothing more than physical appearance and then define “weightism,” preceding an activity where girls learn about fat myths. Unit 4 starts

with a reflection on Unit 3’s “Call to Action” in which girls pay attention to body messages from the media, from peers, and from adults. The reflection has girls discuss the messages out there, specifically the ones from peers making body evaluations. The authors also include a couple of notes about the discussion, such as considering “negative” comments deemed acceptable from friends but not other people and what makes those comments acceptable, the word “fat” as derogatory or simply descriptive, and comments that may constitute sexual harassment—and how, if this occurs, girls need to stand up against these comments (p. 29). Unit 4 continues on with an activity called “The Comeback Kid,” designed as a form of assertiveness training. Using role playing, the girls enter into bully-victim situations and the victim responds to the bully with a scripted comeback in an assertive voice, and the activity goes on to identify ways in which girls can demonstrate their assertiveness against an aggressor through eye contact, speaking firmly and clearly, maintaining a strong physical stance, and contradicting negative statements (p. 31). Unit 7 has girls think about their different type of emotional hungers—intellectual, physical (activity-based), friendship, for solitude, spiritual, and creative (p. 59). By addressing these hungers, girls can challenge two-dimensional gender stereotypes to help address the needs of a more well-rounded self. Lastly, Unit 8 focuses girls on relationships, specifically on resolving conflict and critiquing ideas of popularity. In resolving conflict, the girls read different case studies and talk about their potential resolutions for the problem, analyzing and challenging the responses. With the discussion of popularity, girls contemplate how aspirations of popularity may cause them to sacrifice aspects of themselves, to which they reflect back on the “Full of Ourselves Proclamation,” a positive affirmation of self, from Unit 1 (p. 67).

Your Own Healthy Style has three lessons that contain activities addressing gender socialization. In Lesson 1, students begin to explore presentations of bodies in the media,

drawing the conclusion that bodies in the media do not represent the variety of bodies in the world. Lesson 2 presents a “Gallery of Offenders,” pinpointing specific media representations of women and how they defy the inherent variety and complexity within women themselves (p. 30). The “Gallery of Offenders” offers students a critique of models dressed or posed to look weak, abused, sick, and doll-like. These images are juxtaposed with a “Gallery of Winners” which portrays athletic, active, and more diverse women applauded for their deviation from culturally imposed standards of femininity (p. 31). Lesson 3 contains a handout for students entitled “The Perfect Body Myth” which outlines the diversity of bodies, changes that occur during puberty, and requirements for a healthy body (p. 39-40), contradicting cultural “standards” of female bodies.

Factor Three: Global and Physical Self-Esteem

Healthy Body Image works to build self-esteem in three different lessons. In Lesson 2, children complete a survey that has them identify positive aspects of their identity, addressing physical abilities, care in appearance (not an evaluation of image), academic abilities, creative abilities, relationships, citizenship, physical and emotional health, interests, values, and favorite things (p. 34-36). Then, listing one or two items from each category on small cards, students create a mobile of their positive attributes, demonstrating a whole self crafted from several different parts rather than just one external characteristic. The mobile helps visualize a balanced self, with each part being of identical weight and causing imbalance if any attribute is removed. Lesson 4 causes students to begin rethinking standards of beauty by introducing the role of genetics in physical appearance. If bodies are inherently designed to come in all shapes and sizes, as described in the lesson, adhering to one standard of beauty neglects the natural variety in people. Lesson 9 focuses on physical activity as a core part of a healthy and happy self. In order to help students understand the value of physical activity, the lesson includes an exercise in

which students envision themselves as a wildcat out in the wild, moving, running, chasing, prowling. The vision includes the cat feeling comfortable, proud, strong, and balanced. Then, the image changes to the wildcat being in a zoo, and students imagine how they might feel in confinement in contrast to their former freedom—lazy, restless, unbalanced, and useless. This vision helps students understand the positive role of activity in their own lives. Teachers should not discuss the relationship between activity and fatness/weight loss; instead, the activity should emphasize health and positive self-worth. Next, the lesson outlines five categories of movement (passive sitting, active sitting, normal movement, vigorous movement, and aerobic movement), and students groups perform each type of movement. Following the activity, students discuss the movements, voicing whether or not they enjoyed the activity. Then, students may perform whichever activity they wish. This helps students to find preferred physical activities and consider the role physical activity plays in their own lives.

Full of Ourselves contains seven lessons that address self-esteem. In Unit 1, one of the initial activities involves discussing the title of program. The girls explore what it means for a woman to be “full of herself,” in both positive and negative connotations, but ultimately coming to the idea that it means having “*a strong sense of who you are*” (p. 6). This discussion is followed by the “Full of Ourselves Proclamation” (p. 67), which girls recite daily in order to help instill these ideas in themselves. After this, the girls do a freewrite in which they take a few minutes to remember a time they felt “confident and powerful,” later pointing out that the girls’ examples indicate times when they felt “full of themselves” (p. 7). This first unit also introduces the “Body Scan,” a three to five minute exercise in which the girls have some quiet time in meditation, led by the facilitator, in which to become fully aware of their bodies and the amazing things which their bodies do for them (p. 7-8). The “Body Scan” is repeated throughout many of

the subsequent units. Supplemental activities in this unit focus a great deal on physical activity. “Jumpstart: Catch!” is a combination catch and getting-to-know-you game (p. 9). “Body Statues” asks the girls to create group statues representing certain ideas, such as “Be a good girl” or “Full of ourselves” (p. 9-10). “Bioenergetic Punches” has the girls making some basic punching moves, allowing the girls to feel a sense of empowerment with this as “a metaphor for what it feels like to stand up for ourselves and act powerfully in the world” (p. 10-11). Unit 2, 4, and 7 all include yoga lessons as a supplemental activity, helping the girls utilize yoga as a relaxation technique and a source of inner strength. Unit 2 also includes a freewrite in which each girl envisions herself as “an influential woman in her mid-20s,” writing a newspaper article from a third-person perspective about this woman who has been named Young Woman of the Year (p. 17). Unit 3 includes a freewrite in which the girls write a thank you letter to their bodies. A supplemental activity allows the girls to imagine themselves as their own bodies, responding to their original letter, even suggesting each girl perhaps write with her other hand in order to help change her perspective. Unit 5 includes an activity entitled “The Many Sides of Me” (p. 42). In this activity, each girl receives a 12-exposure disposable camera to take pictures depicting the many sides of herself. The pictures can then merge into a collage or photo essay for the each girl to show off her many sides. In Unit 6, a supplemental activity suggests the girls plan a picnic, including the foods they will bring according to the nutritional information discussed in the unit and determining what kind of physical activities and games they wish to play at the picnic. This allows the girls to design their own activity outside of the group and carry out the concepts learned in the unit in a realistic context.

Your Own Healthy Style has activities directed at self-esteem in two lessons. In Lesson 1, students list the five most important characteristics of who they are right now, attempting to help

students see themselves beyond the superficial (p. 21). The next activity in the lesson has students come up with a new definition of beauty, constructed following a discussion of the history of body image in the twentieth century and the discussion of important personal traits. The new definition should include aspects of positive body image, body diversity, and non-physical elements (p. 22). Lesson 3 introduces students to the Activity Period, which helps them see what kind of and how much activity are needed for a healthy lifestyle (p. 47). In order to explore their own movement, students keep a one-week activity diary so that they can evaluate their own level of activity in their lives.

Factor Four: Coping Strategies and Critical Thinking Skills

Healthy Body Image has two lessons that address media literacy and critical thinking skills. Lesson 1 includes the Namuh story (“human” backwards) that tells how a village gradually evolves into a place concerned about appearance and a newly established standard of beauty, a standard that did not exist until a photographer began to discover new ways to market his product and spread his tips to other businesspeople in the village (p. 20-24). The story offers a general idea of how body image issues develop and shows the effects on the people, especially the women and girls, when the evolution occurs. Lesson 6 entirely focuses on media influences. One activity helps students analyze advertisements, thinking about the attributes connected to products in order to help people believe they need the product—the untold story told by the images in advertisements (p. 105).

In *Full of Ourselves*, Unit 5 solely focuses on critical media literacy. One of the first activities in the unit has the girls look at a sheet of “Values Squares,” a paper chart with a list of values, and choose the ten values most important to them—not values that *should be* important, but values that actually *are* important—and then put them in order of importance (p. 79). They then glue these into their journals and share with the other girls, followed by a discussion. The

next activity has the girls take a new sheet of “Values Squares” and, in pairs, investigate a “girl” magazine to determine what value the magazine deems as being most important. The authors note here to caution the girls against merely looking at the magazines with a very one-sided perspective; instead, the facilitators should encourage the girls to note both positive and negative aspects of the magazine and consider the mixed messages presented (p. 39). One supplemental activity has the girls analyze “boy” magazines using the same value squares and comparing/contrasting the results with those from the “girl” magazines (p. 43). In the “Magazines: What’s Up?” activity, girls in pairs receive a card identifying an item for them to find in the magazine (p. 80), like a scavenger hunt. The cards require the girls to find various things, such as the number of advertisements compared to total pages, big-boned or full-figured females in pictures, or articles and ads focusing on females altering their bodies. The authors include questions for discussion to further critique the magazine’s content. One of the supplemental activities has the girls cut out faces—only faces—in magazines to create a collage. Subsequent questions ask the girls to think about what all these faces have in common and what is missing (e.g. glasses, acne, diversity) in addition to having the girls consider what these faces might say or what the girls might say to them. Another supplemental activity has the girls bring in and watch two music videos apiece, one representing positive female images and one representing negative females images, for analysis (p. 42). Additionally, one supplemental activity includes viewing “Beyond Killing Us Softly” or “Slim Hopes,” videos by Jean Kilbourne criticizing media representations of women. Finally, the “Call to Action” assignment for Unit 5 asks the girls to contact a company and express concerns over the content of their magazines, thus encouraging media activism (p. 82).

Two of the three lessons in *Your Own Healthy Style* address media literacy and the history of body image. A large focus of Lesson 1 is on defining body image and tracing changes in body image throughout the twentieth century. The students view a table of images and descriptions highlighting key body image trends throughout the century (p. 18-19), followed by a discussion of the trends, modern day trends, and how the trends connect to ideas of health and well-being (p. 20). Lesson 2 offers students tips for becoming critical viewers of media. In this lesson, students are shown the “Making of a Model” video, which is a part of a Dove Real Beauty commercial, that shows a sped up version of how a woman is transformed into a model in an advertisement. In the next activity, “A Look at Advertisements,” students are pointed to the About-Face website (<http://www.about-face.org>), which offers information about messages in the media. The lesson’s “Gallery of Offenders” and “Gallery of Winners,” representing negative and positive media portrayals of females respectively, come from the website (p. 30-31). The final activity in the lesson has groups of two to three students analyze popular teen magazines, noting ads that convey messages about appearance. Following a perusal of the magazine, the students discuss questions addressing the impact the magazine may have on a reader, messages conveyed by the ads, and the level of diversity depicted. The last part of this activity has the student groups redesign an ad to sell a product by using healthy, rather than harmful, messages.

Factor Five: Holistic Wellness and Balance

Healthy Body Image contains four lessons that concentrate on holistic well-being. Lesson 5 discusses metabolism and some myths about fat with students in an effort to help them understand some of the multiple facets of determining body shape and size. Students play a game in which they all have a “lunch,” made from paper and cut into equal sized “bites” for each student (p. 90), that they put into their “stomach,” an envelope, from which student remove pieces that they “digest” according to a metabolic rate they have been assigned (p. 86-88). This

game helps children see how different people use up their food energy at different rates, determining how often someone might feel hungry. Lesson 7 addresses dieting and healthy eating. In order for students to understand the effects of dieting, one activity includes an “air diet” in which each student plugs his/her nose and breathes through a straw while trying to focus on a the teacher reading a story aloud. If they “cheat” or “fail,” the teacher teases them about not being able to stick to their diet. Once students start to show the consequences of their diet, the activity is ended and debriefed, with questions addressing issues of focus, feelings of deprivation, and actions once off the “air diet” (p. 116-117). The teacher then connects this to dieting with food. Lesson 8 redirects the dieting discussion to focus on healthy eating habits. In this lesson, students are introduced to the USDA guidelines for healthy eating. The lesson includes a handout for students to use as a guide indicating whether or not they are getting sufficient amounts of food from each food group (p. 139). Students then keep track of what they eat for five days to analyze whether or not they fulfill their nutritional needs (p. 140-141).

Nearly every unit of *Full of Ourselves* contains aspects focusing on holistic health and well-being. Every unit contains at least one opportunity for students to journal, a strategy suggested by Choate in her framework. The focused journals allow the girls to express themselves on a specific topic from which they can draw on or reflect upon as the lessons progress. Unit 2 contains the “Tree of Strength” activity in which girls identify role models and their positive attributes, allowing them to identify strong women from whom they can model themselves. As a supplemental activity in Unit 3, “The Human Knot” has girls tangle their arms together and then use teamwork to untangle themselves, fostering communication and cooperation skills (p. 23). Unit 4 contains some role playing activities, such as “The Comeback Kid” (p. 29-31) and “The Party” (p. 32), that help girls develop positive, assertive interaction

skills. Additionally, a supplemental interview activity has girls pair up and interview each other in an effort to get to know each other better, teaching them to ask open-ended questions, listen actively, and request clarification when necessary (p. 34-35). In Unit 6, the girls complete and discuss a questionnaire about eating habits (p. 83). After discussing healthy eating habits, the girls complete an activity called “Mommy May I?” in which they each draw a slip where an imaginary eight-year-old daughter has made a food-related request (p. 86). Each girl responds considering what they have learned about nutrition. Also in this unit, when the girls plan a picnic, they employ what they have learned about nutrition in conjunction with leisure activities in a cooperative effort to plan the event (p. 48). Unit 7 addresses holistic wellness by focusing on all the hungers not related to eating—intellectual, physical, friendship, for solitude, spiritual, and creative (p. 58-59). These hungers are depicted as equally important to food hunger. The discussion of these hungers helps the girls understand that sometimes people do things to fulfill one hunger when they really need to fulfill another, such as emotional eating. One of the tasks in the “Call to Action” for the unit has the girls journal freely at the end of each day (until the next meeting), and another task has the girls interview two adults to find out what they do to relieve stress. In Unit 8, one of the activities focuses girls on their relationship connections, creating a “Constellation Connection” of various personal relationships and their current statuses. Time permitting, girls can actually pinpoint certain relationships they would like to strengthen and discuss strategies for strengthening those relationships. After the eight units are complete, the girls begin the “Throw Your Weight Around!” sessions in Phase 2 of the program, where they become mentors to younger girls, leading them through a condensed version of the program by sharing the knowledge and some activities. With the assistance of their own facilitators, the girls organize and design how they wish to present the program to the younger group of girls. This

activity requires knowledge, teamwork, social competence, mentoring, and creative and critical thinking skills, plus it offers opportunities for girls to highlight their own personal strengths in the responsibilities they have within the “Throw Your Weight Around!” sessions.

In *Your Own Healthy Style*, Lesson 3 focuses on health and well-being. The lesson addresses the dangers of dieting, with ten reasons why not to and ways to eat and be healthy. It includes a checklist for healthy eating, which contains items such as whether or not the student eats breakfast, how much water s/he drinks, how much time s/he takes to eat meals, and if s/he pays attention to hunger cues (p. 44). The healthy behaviors addressed in this lesson focus largely on eating habits, but they also include sleep and physical activity. Following the discussion of healthy eating, students keep a personal food diary for three days (p. 45-46). After finishing the diary, students analyze their eating habits and identify goals for improving any bad habits.

Discussion

Overall, each of the three programs addresses all five factors of Choate’s framework, though to varying degrees. However, the level of depth at attacking body image issues and the practicality of implementing each program differ.

Of all three curricula, *Full of Ourselves* offers the most depth and the most thorough development of Choate’s factors. Although all three programs offer a spectrum of lessons and activities, *Full of Ourselves*, because it is designed as an extracurricular program, has the space in which to dive deeper into the concepts without the limitations of the structured classroom environment. Additionally, the smaller group size allows for more time in sharing and discussing responses and reflections on issues. The group size along with the self-selected nature of the group also add to the ease of group management and therefore allows for more instructional time, something that can be more of a challenge in a traditional classroom. With the content, the

Full of Ourselves curriculum often had more units addressing the five factors than the other curriculum pieces, and each unit contained more activities, with added supplemental activities, than either *Healthy Body Image* or *Your Own Healthy Style*. Furthermore, this program contains proactive aspects, including the “Call to Action” activities with each unit and the “Throw Your Weight Around!” mentoring program, that help the girls transfer the concepts learned into real-world experiences. This transference of knowledge and reflection beyond the classroom may help ensure lasting change.

However effective *Full of Ourselves* may be, *Healthy Body Image* and *Your Own Healthy Style* have greater efficacy in a traditional classroom setting, if no adaptations are made to any of the pieces. The latter curriculum pieces, specifically designed for classroom implementation, more readily avail themselves for teachers to use. *Healthy Body Image* and *Your Own Healthy Style* are packaged to be teacher friendly. Especially with *Your Own Healthy Style*, the user-friendly curriculum allows for a teacher to pick it up one day and implement it the next. *Healthy Body Image* includes extensive background reading that, although it requires additional time on the teacher’s behalf, offers a full picture of knowledge necessary to support the lessons and have informed discussions with students and parents.

Specifically with *Full of Ourselves*, the extracurricular nature of the design limits the programs effectiveness. Although the program offers great depth and has many opportunities for proactive work for the girls involved, as a before- or after-school program, it limits the involvement of some girls. Also, as a pull-out program in which girls leave their classes once a week, this sort of challenges the programs ideas of producing well-rounded girls, as they miss a class, academic or elective, in order to be involved in something extra. Because the program offers some great knowledge and activities for girls to challenge current standards of beauty and

femininity in order to develop more well-rounded individuals, it would be unfortunate to limit the program to only select girls.

One problem with all the programs is duration. While *Full of Ourselves* offers the longest program with the added mentoring program, the other two programs offer a limited unit to be presented in classes. Studies conducted by Rabak-Wagener, Eickhoff-Shemek, and Kelly-Vance (1998), Fuller, Damico, and Rodgers (2004), and Chambers and Alexander (2007) suggest that while even just one unit or a few lessons of body image education, especially critical media literacy, can begin to alter the ways in which girls and young women think about bodies, the infusion and repetition of the concepts into the general curriculum as a whole works best to affect lasting change. Thus, the most effective usage of the programs would be to expand and integrate them into the classroom so that the units pepper in the current curriculum throughout the school year, enhancing lessons that may not be focused specifically on body image but offering repeated messages to students.

Potential Challenges to the Programs

Because the body image curriculum does not exist as a standard portion of the general curriculum, introduction of the curriculum as distinct units in classrooms may pose a number of challenges from multiple perspectives. Although the justification for the programs can be qualified with documented research, challenges may still come from other teachers or administration, parents, district officials, and even students.

Although the curricula, like *Healthy Body Image* for example, promote a whole-school approach, the curricula may be a difficult sell to administration or to teachers. With schools under persistent pressure to meet the requirements of standardized testing, pertinent in determining student and school progress, filtering something else into the curriculum that will not be tested may seem to teachers irrelevant and burdensome. Consequently, the curriculum,

whichever one or combination used, should integrate with other lessons. Additionally, teachers must understand the important role body image plays in pre- and early-adolescence. By integrating knowledge to help students understand their growing and changing bodies and challenging sociocultural messages about the “rules” for bodies, students may gain more confidence and have less concern about appearance-related matters, thereby allowing them to spend more focus on academics and develop more holistically as individuals.

In addition to challenges within the school, teachers or schools who implement any of the curricula may face concerns from parents. If the programs hold an introductory night for parents, as both *Healthy Body Image* and *Full of Ourselves* suggest, this can act as a forum to offer validation for the program’s implementation and allow parents to pose any questions they might have. Some of the concerns might be similar to the aforementioned concerns of teachers and administrators. Many parents understand the high stakes involved with standardized testing and may feel tentative about anything that might detract from the education students need to pass the test. However, if parents understand the real-world implications of body image curriculum and understand that its purpose is not to supersede other classroom learning, perhaps they will be supportive of program changes.

Thus far, both challenges of school and parents are concerned with standardized testing. Although effective teachers can teach creative, innovative lessons that address required standards and promote learning that can extend into the real world, standardized testing looms over all teachers. The reality is that the test results determine student progress, teacher success, and school grading, even if in the broader picture more factors come into play in evaluating these components. This suggests the reasons why body image curriculum may be most effective if integrated into the general curriculum rather than existing as a separate entity. By addressing

body image concerns in conjunction with other subject-specific lessons, the message may have more impact and fewer people will feel concerned over this added element to the curriculum.

Issues of Diversity

Although *Full of Ourselves* and *Healthy Body Image* indicate that they apply for pre- and early-adolescents of any race or ethnicity, the content offers a limited focus on diversity. All three curriculum pieces address the standards of body image that are predominantly white, Western, heterosexual, and female. While these images pervade the media and, because of their pervasiveness, act as a logical starting point, diversity remains largely ignored, aside from some references to gender.

While Western media predominantly focuses on images of bodies portrayed as white (or nearly white) and heterosexual, discussions imbedded in the lessons do not include much discussion of racial or ethnic diversity. Activities that ask students to examine ads for sexiness do not ask them to consider how women (or men) of different races are represented. Activities chiefly concentrate on slimness, sexiness, and physical perfection (to be slim and sexy) and may neglect how people of different races are included because of their strong “white” characteristics or their exoticness, unless these issues are brought up independently by students. Although the background information for Lesson 1 of *Healthy Body Image* offers some cultural insights to bodies, like binding of the feet in China or rings to extend the neck in Northern Thailand, the information is designed just for the teachers and is not an actual part of the lesson. Furthermore, none of the curriculum pieces consider standards for beauty in other races or cultures. If a school or group contains Hispanic, African American, or Asian American individuals, for instance, it may be important to understand and discuss varying standards of body image within these cultural groups.

Another narrow aspect of the programs is that they all focus on heterosexual messages in images. Though not explicitly stated, the pieces contain constant references to the sexualization in images (females for the male gaze) and about gender relationships, specifically female friendships and male-female romantic relationships. This, however, may differ from the reality for some students and can perhaps make the transition from childhood to adolescence challenging for those who identify as non-heterosexual or question their own sexuality. This said, the reasons for assuming heterosexuality are likely due to 1) the tendency for American society to tend to assume heterosexuality as the norm, 2) the media's proliferation of largely heterosexual imagery, and 3) the controversial nature of even hinting at anything non-heterosexual in a school context. Although a potentially sensitive and controversial topic in middle school classrooms, students should at least understand that the heterosexist images presented in the media marginalize certain groups of people.

An additional concern of the programs is the focus on nutrition and the inattention to some causes of poor nutrition. While some children may make unhealthy food choices based on their own preferences, some other children may not have the opportunities to make a lot of choices. Children living in impoverished conditions may not have the same access to certain nutritional foods as others. I do not suggest, however, that nutrition information remain unaddressed. Students living in poverty may receive free or reduced-cost meals from the schools, and the knowledge of nutrition can influence the choices they might make in the lunch line.

One final diversity concern involves gender. *Full of Ourselves* is specifically tailored for girls, whereas *Healthy Body Image* and *Your Own Healthy Style* are designed for traditional classroom implementation, including both boys and girls. Involving both genders in body image curriculum allows teachers to address issues with girls and boys as well as educating them both

about and uniting them in the challenge against harmful body image “rules.” By including girls and boys, body image issues broaden so that both groups can understand the impacts of messages about bodies on each other. However, joining girls and boys in a class to discuss body image issues may cause some individuals to feel uncomfortable discussing certain topics or expressing themselves. *Full of Ourselves* constructs a place in which girls can be open and feel free to express themselves. It also allows for the focus to be on the effects of media and beauty standards for females and for strategies specific to girls. Perhaps the best resolution would be to structure the curriculum in order to address boys and girls independently then bring them together to share their knowledge and understand the ways in which body image messages can oppress all people.

By increasing the focus of diversity in the programs, the curricula can be more effective for more groups, not only addressing students who may identify within these diverse categories but also helping to educate *all* students regarding the breadth of media and cultural messages about bodies. By understanding the narrow “standards” of beauty conveyed in media messages, students have more fodder for fighting the messages and creating a broader and more inclusive definition of beauty.

CHAPTER 3: A PROPOSAL FOR CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION

Recently, I watched the movie *Queen Sized* in which fictional Byrd High School's "fat girl" Maggie Baker (Nikki Blonsky) was nominated for Senior Homecoming Queen as a cruel joke by the best friend of the prettiest and most popular girl in school. As a result of the nomination, Maggie experienced harsh torment from many classmates and concerns about hurt and disappointment from her mother and friends. In spite of the opposition, Maggie, along with the support of her two closest friends, decided to stay in the race and run to represent all the people who did not fit in the stereotypical image of the popular, "perfect" teen, the type who generally wins such titles. Maggie's size always existed at the forefront of debates about her appropriateness for Homecoming Queen, even after she won the title. She not only struggled for acceptance with students but also with the assistant principal, who advised Maggie to drop out of the race from the beginning; Maggie struck back at the assistant principal by pinpointing her as part of the problem, as guilty as the students for believing that the Homecoming Queen should be a certain "type" of person. Maggie fought to challenge judgments people make based simply on an individual's appearance—judgments that go beyond just size.

This movie, among other similar movies and novels, exemplifies a problem inherent within our schools and culture. Maggie points out that, like the assistant principal, many people in our society have beliefs about what bodies are appropriate or acceptable for certain roles and that this type of discrimination often remains unchallenged. Ultimately, stories like this serve as a testimonial to the need for body image curriculum in schools.

Having taught middle school, I understand the challenges teachers face in trying to do all they need and want to do in the limited time available. I also understand the frustration of having something else added to the curriculum when it may already seem overwhelmed. While the three

curriculum pieces in the previous chapter all operate as additions to current curricula, their elements and purposes can infuse with the four core subjects, and even into certain elective subjects, in order to establish and reinforce ideas throughout the school, helping to enhance rather than detract from the requirements within those subjects. With the importance of high stakes testing and its implications for schools, any new additions to curricula must be closely linked to standards. While body image curriculum may seem frivolous to some, the lessons provided in *Healthy Body Image*, *Full of Ourselves*, and *Your Own Healthy Style* can be integrated into core subjects and tied to subject-based standards. In addition to the academic value of these lessons with regard to health, cultural awareness, diversity, and critical thinking, these lessons can also develop more well-rounded, socially aware individuals, perhaps even helping students become more assertive and confident.

While the basic three R's can fit into lessons or activities in body image curriculum, issues of body image can more easily merge into existing curricula, especially through lessons that teach about diversity and media. Many classroom activities dealing with diversity, at least in my observations and experiences, generally revolve around issues of race, ethnicity, religion, and occasionally gender. Definitions of diversity can expand to encompass ability/disability, language, age, culture, sexuality, class, and, of course, body image. An important route for addressing issues of diversity, as well as building critical thinking skills and creating a more democratic, student-centered environment, is through critical media literacy.

Incorporating Critical Media Literacy

Media literacy is a key part of the education system in English-speaking nations like Canada, England, and Australia but still struggles to work its way into classrooms in the United States (Kubey, 1998; Minke, 2002; Chen, 2007). Because the United States produces a majority of media around the world, media literacy would seem to naturally have a greater presence in

schools than it does (Kubey, 1998). Critical media literacy is about far more than showing a film to accompany a lesson or talking about the dangers of advertisements or popular music. Critical media literacy allows students to develop analytical and evaluative skills for thinking about media's construction, audience, creators, related social and political structures, promoted values, and omitted topics and representations—while still maintaining the role of pleasure and enjoyment through media (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Critical media literacy also does not assume that students come to the table as empty vessels who mindlessly adopt messages transmitted by media; instead, it recognizes that students have diverse backgrounds and experiences that allow them to perceive and interact with media in different ways (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Additionally, media literacy's flexible nature allows for its integration into any subject area and most lessons as well as having the ability to stand on its own.

Critical media literacy creates a great space for addressing body image. So many messages about body image are transmitted through media. Consider the limited diversity among bodies in television shows and movies, the multitude of advertisements for weight loss products and programs, the way in which a number of characters portray appearance-related issues in conjunction with femininity or masculinity, and the amount of this media we consume on a daily basis. Teachers and students can work together to deconstruct media and our associated beliefs and begin to understand that these ideas are created by some entity, often with a specific agenda. For example, advertisements in the Dove Real Beauty campaign or Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly* series can allow students to see some of the manipulation that goes on with media advertising. Classes can deconstruct body image in Disney movies, analyze statistics and information related to obesity, trace the history of bodies in art, or create their own media (videos, websites, blogs, children's books) challenging current images or representing greater

body diversity. By working through critical media literacy, students and teachers can deconstruct messages that perpetuate “the beauty myth” (Wolf, 1990) and embrace a broader definition of diversity while fostering critical thinking and meeting subject-area standards.

Integrating Body Image Concepts into the Subject Areas

As Kathy Kater (2005) advocates in the introduction of her *Healthy Body Image* curriculum, challenging cultural ideas about body image in schools is most effective when supported by the entire school and implemented across the curriculum, allowing for important concepts to be sprinkled throughout the students’ school experience rather than concentrated in one unit for one class. Kater indicates that there may even be some overlap with current lessons, allowing for a clear connection of body image concepts to existing classroom lessons and activities. In addition to lessons from *Healthy Body Image*, lessons from *Full of Ourselves* and *Your Own Healthy Style* can be integrated into or adapted to fit with established lesson plans.

Following are some suggestions for implementing body image curriculum concepts in with the core subject areas: English/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. The suggestions include lesson ideas from the three body image curricula in addition to some general ideas of my own. While my specific focus on suggestions will be with middle school students in mind, they can be adapted to suit upper elementary and high school audiences. Furthermore, the suggestions will be linked to educational standards created by national education organizations within each subject area, which correlate with most state standards in the subjects. (Please note that the suggestions may align with part, and not all, of some standards due to the wide array of goals covered by some standards, especially in the Social Sciences.) My goal is not to recreate established subject area curricula or to compose detailed lesson plans but to offer some possible suggestions for how body image concepts can be implemented without creating a burden for teachers or detracting from teacher and school goals for learning.

English/Language Arts

English/Language Arts classes, due to the openness of content, provide a great space for opportunities to include critical media literacy and body image issues. Additionally, English/Language Arts is often a subject in which media literacy is integrated, on the occasions in which it is integrated.

One way to address body image in Language Arts/English is through novels or stories. This can be done in a couple of ways. Students can read novels or stories specifically focused on body image issues and connect them to other elements in English/Language Arts, such as narrative structure, character development, or point of view. However, many novels dealing with body image tend to be linked to eating disorders or may contain questionable content, including language or sexual behavior. Usage of these materials would greatly depend upon the teacher, the school, and the classroom environment. Another way to address body image could be through novels and stories relating to diversity or coming of age. Many books and stories on these topics exist, specifically designed for younger adolescents. While the content may not specifically focus on body image, the teacher can introduce ideas or activities that extend beyond the text, situating the experiences of the characters in the real world or expanding to include similar issues related to body image. For example, if students are reading a novel about children or teenagers and racial diversity, ideas about difference and discrimination can encompass more than race, having students think about other differences and how people treat others as a result of these differences.

A few different examples can be offered for how to draw in media as a core part of an activity. Teachers could carry out a unit on propaganda. A propaganda unit would allow students to think about several different types of media—television, magazines, billboards, social networking sites, search engines. In this context, students can also think about media

representations, including ideas about bodies, femininity, masculinity, physical appearance, and diversity. All three body image curricula contain lessons that have students think about media images, ideas which can be integrated into a propaganda unit. Another lesson could address representations of appearance and femininity/masculinity in fairy tales, which can also include Disney depictions. Students can think about the messages being sent through these common, animated, seemingly harmless images. They can even bring in samples from their favorite cartoons or television shows to discuss representations of gender and appearance, both positive and negative.

Furthermore, students can create their own media challenging body image issues. While these can be framed in larger issues of diversity, students could create plays/skits, children’s books, movies, websites, or blogs that focus on body image and/or other forms of diversity. They can share these artifacts with others, bringing their academic lives into the real world. These can be shared with peers or with family, or students could even arrange a mini field trip to a local elementary school to share their plays/skits, children’s books, or movies with younger students, much like the “Throw Your Weight Around” program by Steiner-Adair and Sjostrom (2006). Plus, in designing their own media, students will have to think about how media are constructed by larger companies, challenging some of those choices in order to embrace more diversity and subvert the established media representations.

The ideas listed above meet the following standards for English/Language Arts curriculum established by the National Council of Teachers of English in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1. National Standards for Language Arts

Code for Standard	Strand	Description
NL-ENG.K-12.1	Reading for Perspective	Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment..

Table 3-1. Continued

NL-ENG.K-12.3	Evaluation Strategies	Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
NL-ENG.K-12.4	Communication Skills	Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
NL-ENG.K-12.5	Communication Strategies	Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
NL-ENG.K-12.6	Applying Knowledge	Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
NL-ENG.K-12.7	Evaluating Data	Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
NL-ENG.K-12.8	Developing Research Skills	Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
NL-ENG.K-12.9	Multicultural Understanding	Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
NL-ENG.K-12.11	Participating in Society	Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
NL-ENG.K-12.12	Applying Language Skills	Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Source: http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/lang_arts/english/k_12.shtml. Last accessed February, 2009.

Math

Unfortunately, none of the body image curricula have lessons that are explicitly linked to Math instruction. However, many lessons can be tweaked to work in a Math classroom, and some lessons can be restructured to work across disciplines, allowing projects that can be shared across classes.

One basic way to integrate body image concerns, media, and mathematics skills is through activities dealing with statistics or percentages. One activity could involve collecting data from magazines. Students can study different types of magazines to determine the ratio of advertisements to other content, the products advertised, the intended audience for the magazine, and the explanations connecting the three previous factors. Many classrooms have easy access to magazines, and bringing in magazines helps draw connections between math and the real world. Students could also go further to construct their own studies in which they might survey or interview students or teachers to gather information about a topic related to body image, such as use of diet products, food or media consumption, or possible reactions to advertisements. Students can also figure the financial impact relating to health and beauty products, determining how much people spend on appearance-related products, perhaps even comparing it to what people spend on other items. They could also think about how much is invested in advertising such products and the implications of this kind of spending.

In order to connect math content to other subject areas and the real world, students could create budgets. For example, using information gathered about nutrition from a Science class, students in a Math class could create budgets for home menus, eating plans, or grocery shopping. Students could also compare the costs of healthy eating to the costs of buying junk food, or the costs of healthy eating at home compared to eating out frequently. From the information, students can draw conclusions about the comparisons, considering why some junk foods might cost less than healthy counterparts and how this affects people's health. To go a step further, teachers can have students think about what this means for families at different economic levels, even questioning the fairness of food costs. In order to actually put these concepts in action, students in a Math class could financially plan out a class picnic, also considering health

concepts learned in Science, determining costs for everything and even figuring out ways to raise money for the picnic.

The standards for Math, created by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, that link to the curriculum suggestions above can be found in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2. National Standards for Mathematics

Code for Standard	Strand	Description
NM-DATA.6-8.1	Data Analysis & Probability	Formulate questions, design studies, and collect data about a characteristic shared by two populations or different characteristics within one population; select, create, and use appropriate graphical representations of data, including histograms, box plots, and scatterplots.
NM-DATA.6-8.3		Use observations about differences between two or more samples to make conjectures about the populations from which the samples were taken; make conjectures about possible relationships between two characteristics of a sample on the basis of scatterplots of the data and approximate lines of fit; use conjectures to formulate new questions and plan new studies to answer them.
NM-PROB.PK-12.3	Problem Solving	Apply and adapt a variety of appropriate strategies to solve problems.
NM-PROB.REA.PK-12.1	Reasoning & Proof	Recognize reasoning and proof as fundamental aspects of mathematics.
NM-PROB.REA.PK-12.2		Make and investigate mathematical conjectures.
NM-PROB.REA.PK-12.4		Select and use various types of reasoning and methods of proof.
NM-PROB.COMM.PK-12.1	Communication	Organize and consolidate their mathematical thinking through communication.
NM-PROB.COMM.PK-12.2		Communicate their mathematical thinking coherently and clearly to peers, teachers, and others.
NM-PROB.COMM.PK-12.3		Analyze and evaluate the mathematical thinking and strategies of others.
NM-PROB.CONN.PK-12.3	Connections	Recognize and apply mathematics in contexts outside of mathematics.
NM-PROB.REP.PK-12.1	Representations	Create and use representations to organize, record, and communicate mathematical ideas
NM-PROB.REP.PK-12.3		Use representations to model and interpret physical, social, and mathematical phenomena.

Source: <http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/math/index.shtml>. Last accessed February, 2009.

Science

Due to the connection to health and physical development, Science classes have a strong tie in with body image. All three body image curricula have lessons and activities focused on health, nutrition, and physical activity that can easily be integrated with existing lessons on related topics. Additionally, body image is linked with development and changes during puberty. Kater (2005) advises against discussing body image in conjunction with sex education/human growth and development curriculum as it can limit open conversations about body image due to student discomfort with the general topic. However, if discussions of body image are connected to the curriculum in multiple areas, other opportunities for discussion exist and important connections between body image and puberty can be drawn.

Many Science classes may already include lessons associated with health and nutrition. Students often study the food pyramid, nutritional information on product labels, and the value of physical activity; nutrition-focused topics may also be found in physical education or health classes, depending on the school. Teachers and students should talk about *why* we need certain foods to survive and *why* the food pyramid makes its recommendations. In conjunction with nutritional needs, students and teachers should discuss dieting and its potential dangers. Kater (2006) has an activity called “The Air Diet” in which students perform an experiment on themselves to see what happens when they limit their air intake (p. 116-117). Follow up questions have students consider how they felt during, what they thought about, and how they reacted at the end of the “air diet.” Kater then links this to dieting and its adverse affects. Stein and Bark (2006) have students maintain separate food and activity diaries, allowing students to trace their food intake and amount of exercise, compare them to healthy recommendations, and set personal goals for how to attain a healthier lifestyle (p. 44-50). Steiner-Adair and Sjoström (2006) include activities that get students thinking about *why* they are eating, whether out of

physical or emotional hunger. They include a short questionnaire about eating (p. 83), a list of healthy snacks for different purposes (p. 84), and a description of “normal eating” (p. 85) that students could use to construct healthy attitudes about food. The authors have activities designed to help students think about ways to address non-physical hungers without turning to food (p. 58-59). They also have an extension activity that has students plan a picnic that includes a variety of healthy foods in addition to physical activities—an activity that can be replicated in classrooms to build upon science and math (budgeting) skills as well as help students develop important personal skills while also allowing students to have fun (p. 48).

When thinking about health and nutrition, teachers should also direct students to think about connections to media. Some science teachers request that students bring product packages and labels to class so they can examine nutritional information. This could be extended to have students also think about packaging, paying special attention to certain words and phrases that may cause people to buy certain products (e.g. whole grains, low fat, lite). Furthermore, students could study advertisements from television, magazines, or social networking sites (such as myspace) that display items or programs relating to health and nutrition, noting if the advertisements portray healthy or unhealthy choices.

Discussions of physical development should help students understand how and why their bodies grow and change. Probably the most important body image related concepts that should come out of these activities and discussions are that certain bodily changes are normal and natural, fat is necessary for proper development, and our bodies’ shapes and sizes are more influenced by genetics than external factors, by as much as 80% (Maine, 2000; Kater, 2006). In my adolescent years, I remember learning over and over about sex organs and menstruation, but it was not until well into adulthood I learned the significance of fat in the growing process. With

the common ideal for both girls and boys of “perfect” bodies having virtually no fat, students must be aware of its role in development and break that unrealistic idea of the “perfect” body. Kater’s (2005) lesson on puberty (p. 39-63) can easily be integrated in with existing curriculum addressing puberty; she even includes a “How Appearance Changes in Puberty” handbook that can be photocopied and completed by students (p. 53-69). In a lesson on genetics, Kater (2005) has students consider the many physical characteristics that are inherited, including an activity that has students determine from whom in their family they may have inherited certain characteristics (p. 74-75). Following the information about puberty and genetics, students can examine media depictions of physical appearance to determine how they are limited and often not representative of the diversity that naturally exists within people.

In Table 3-3, the national standards for Science, designed by the National Academies of Science, that link to the suggestions for incorporating body image are listed.

Table 3-3. National Science Education Standards

Code for Standard	Strand	Description
NS.5-8.1	Science as Inquiry	As a result of activities in grades 5-8, all students should develop abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry; understandings about scientific inquiry.
NS.5-8.3	Life Science	As a result of their activities in grades 5-8, all students should develop understanding structure and function in living systems; reproduction and heredity; regulation and behavior; populations and ecosystems; diversity and adaptations of organisms.
NS.5-8.5	Science & Technology	As a result of activities in grades 5-8, all students should develop abilities of technological design; understandings about science and technology.
NS.5-8.6	Personal & Social Perspectives	As a result of activities in grades 5-8, all students should develop understanding personal health; populations, resources, and environments; natural hazards; risks and benefits; science and technology in society.

Source: http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/science/5_8.shtml. Last accessed February, 2009.

Social Studies

Because Social Studies involves the relationships between people, society, and time periods, body image can be introduced and studied from a societal and historical context. Students can also have the opportunity to consider the role of the government and economy in relation to certain body image issues.

In Social Studies lessons that focus on history, body image can be incorporated when discussing people and society. Lesson one in *Your Own Healthy Style* includes an activity that gets students focused on how beauty has changed throughout the 20th century (Stein & Bark, 2006, p. 18-20). In a class more focused on world history, images from other countries and time periods could also be used to create a timeline of beauty. From either approach, students can note the ways in which ideas of beauty have changed throughout time and uncover the reasons for why these changes have occurred; for instance, the Industrial Revolution in the United States was a time of important change in body image because a middle class of women emerged with more time and resources which allowed them to alter their foci from the survival of the home and family to the interests of the self (Wolf, 1990). Students can observe the differences in the depictions of bodies in works by artists from the Renaissance (such as Botticelli) or the Baroque (such as Rubens) and the prominent images present in the media today, concluding that “beauty” is not a fixed entity.

Additionally, teachers can lead students on an exploration of body image in terms of other forms of diversity. Students can examine assumptions about acceptable standards for beauty based on race and ethnicity, such as the notion that it is often acceptable for African American and Hispanic women to be larger or curvier. This could also expand into the relationships between wealth and body image; in some present and past cultures, larger bodies for both women and men are indicative of health and wealth. Students could also think about

rules for physical appearance in terms of gender. In the United States, females receive multiple messages about appearance from the media, including companies advertising products to lose weight, eliminate wrinkles, cover up blemishes, lengthen lashes, perk up breasts, trim bellies, recolor hair, and plump lips. However, in Nigeria the Wodaabe men devote themselves to “elaborate makeup sessions, and compete—provocatively painted and dressed, with swaying hops and seductive expressions—in beauty contests judged by women” (Wolf, 1990, p. 122), reversing our own expectations of beauty and gender. Again, these concepts can reinforce the idea that body image and physical appearance are relative concepts, differing dependent upon race, ethnicity, gender, culture, location, wealth, and time period. These ideas about body image can be tied in with studies of cultures and time periods, and thus are infused with the curriculum throughout the school year.

Social Studies teachers can also draw in popular media to examine in relation to core civic and economic concepts. Because the United States is a major producer of media (Kubey, 1998) and a major world power, the media produced becomes internationally consumed. Students can think about how media produced by the United States affects people in other countries. This will offer an opportunity for any students in the class who are originally from other nations to share their own experiences with media imported to their country. Furthermore, students can think about how the expanding global economy and the availability of the world at our fingertips through the internet might affect people in the United States and in other countries, in terms of body image and other concepts. Students can also think more broadly about advertising and its economic effects, even honing in on the major focus in the market on products aimed at correcting or enhancing physical appearance and thinking about what would happen to the market if this segment disappeared. Teachers can also help students draw

connections between the marketing of beauty products and the question of who constructs this media, ultimately thinking about who controls the way we think about body image.

The suggestions for incorporating body image concepts into Social Studies can be linked to the standards, constructed by the National Council for the Social Studies, located in Table 3-4.

Table 3-4. National Social Studies and History Standards

Code for Standard	Strand	Description
NSS-C.5-8.4	Civics: Other Nations and World Affairs	What is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs? How is the world organized politically? How has the United States influenced other nations and how have other nations influenced American politics and society?
NSS-C.5-8.5	Civics: Roles of the Citizen	What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy? What is citizenship? What are the rights of citizens? What are the responsibilities of citizens? What dispositions or traits of character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy? How can citizens take part in civic life?
NSS-EC.5-8.9	Economics: Role of Competition	Sellers compete on the basis of price, product quality, customer service, product design and variety, and advertising. Competition among buyers of a product results in higher product prices. The level of competition in a market is influenced by the number of buyers and sellers.
NSS-G.K-12.4	Geography: Human Systems	Understand the characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface. Understand the characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics. Understand the patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface. Understand the processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement. Understand how the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface.
NSS-USH.5-12.6	US History: Era 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900)	Understands how the rise of corporations, heavy industry, and mechanized farming transformed the American people. Understands massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts, and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity. Understands the rise of the American labor movement and how political issues reflected social and economic changes. Understands Federal Indian policy and United States foreign policy after the Civil War.
NSS-USH.5-12.9	US History: Era 9: Postwar United States (1945-Early 1970s)	Understands the economic boom and social transformation of postwar United States. Understands how the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics. Understands domestic policies after World War II. Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and the extension of civil liberties

Table 3-4. Continued

NSS-USH.9-12.10	US History: Era 10: Contemporary United States (1968-the Present)	Understands recent developments in foreign and domestic politics. Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States.
NSS-WH.5-12.6	World History: Era 6: The Emergence of the First Global Age, 1450-1770	The student in grades 5-12 should understand how the transoceanic interlinking of all major regions of the world from 1450 to 1600 led to global transformations; how European society experienced political, economic, and cultural transformations in an age of global intercommunication, 1450-1750; how large territorial empires dominated much of Eurasia between the 16th and 18th centuries; economic, political, and cultural interrelations among peoples of Africa, Europe, and the Americas, 1500-1750; transformations in Asian societies in the era of European expansion; major global trends from 1450 to 1770.
NSS-WH.5-12.7	World History: Era 7: An Age of Revolutions, 1750-1914	The student in grades 5-12 should understand the causes and consequences of political revolutions in the late 18th and early 19th centuries; the causes and consequences of the agricultural and industrial revolutions, 1700-1850; the transformation of Eurasian societies in an era of global trade and rising European power, 1750-1850; patterns of nationalism, state-building, and social reform in Europe and the Americas, 1830-1914; patterns of global change in the era of Western military and economic domination, 1850-1914; major global trends from 1750 to 1914.
NSS-WH.5-12.9	World History: Era 9: The 20 th Century Since 1945: Promises and Paradoxes	The student in grades 5-12 should understand how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up; the search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world; major global trends since World War II.

Source: http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/soc_sci/index.shtml. Last accessed February, 2009.

Moving Beyond the Classroom

In the *Full of Ourselves* curriculum, Catherine Steiner-Adair and Lisa Sjostrom (2006) advocate for an extracurricular approach to body image. While I see tremendous value in incorporating body image into the subject areas, I also value the space for expanding these ideas outside the classroom. After all, the ultimate purpose of infusing these body image concepts is to help students shape their beliefs and ideas in their own lives, not only within the academic setting. The hope is that the combination of this real world issue with the prominent (and interesting) force of media will help students extend their thinking deeper into their lives.

However, offering additional spaces for exercising these thinking skills can benefit students further, and perhaps even impact the school environment.

The authors of *Full of Ourselves* offer two strong extension activities for students. The Call to Action assignments that follow each lesson allow students to take their learning out of the classroom. They are afforded opportunities to employ their knowledge in their own lives and share their knowledge with friends and family members, hopefully sparking important conversation. These assignments differ from traditional homework assignments in that they do not require a textbook or an answer sheet. Instead, they require students to take the knowledge and thinking skills developed in the classroom and apply them to their own lives. The other extension activity the authors of *Full of Ourselves* offer is the “Throw Your Weight Around” program in which the students then become the teachers for a younger group of students. This mini program allows the students to become the “experts” and mentor younger students in their area of expertise. The program has a double impact; it allows the students to share their knowledge and skills, and it helps empower students as leaders, building assertiveness and self-esteem—assets in challenging intolerance and injustice. While these two extension activities are specific to *Full of Ourselves*, teachers could adapt the Call to Action activities to their own classroom, having students connect subject-related topics with body image concepts and connecting both of those to the real world. Additionally, offering students opportunities to be the conveyers of knowledge or mentors to their younger counterparts can be done for any subject area. Students could pick and choose certain “Throw Your Weight Around” activities that might fit with their subject area, adapt the lesson, and then carry them out with a younger group of students in a one-day field trip. For example, students in an English/Language Arts class could create children’s books or videos dealing with diversity—including various types of diversity—to read or show to elementary

school students, following up with questions, discussion, or even some group activities. Students in a Science class could integrate what they have learned about health and nutrition with the “Activities about Healthy Eating” (p. 123-124) from the “Throw Your Weight Around” program.

Full of Ourselves is, in and of itself, an extracurricular program. For educators interested in further explorations of body image, they could choose to operate the *Full of Ourselves* program as a club or after-school activity, as the authors initially suggest. Especially if operating in conjunction with a school-wide integration of body image concepts, an extracurricular program could be very powerful.

For students who may have special interests relate to body image, extracurricular groups could form to address those special interests. Educators could form feminist or fat activist groups which could interplay with body image ideas but maybe have a different focus. Feminist groups could broaden perspectives to explore other issues. Fat activist groups might stem from those more radically invested in body image issues, specifically working to develop a fat positive perspective within the school, further combating body image issues. Or perhaps students may just want to form body image clubs. After her own struggles with body image and anorexia, fourteen-year-old Abby Kaufmann formed her own group, NoBODYs Perfect as a way to combat unfair representations of bodies in the media. Her non-profit group started as a community organization, with the intentions of also gaining teacher sponsorship as a club in her high school. NoBODYs Perfect has had some local community activities promoting healthy body image, including a pizza part on International No Diet Day in which people ditched their fashion magazines and a fashion show for people of all shapes and sizes. The organization has its own website, http://www.nobodysperfect.org/NoBODYs_Perfect/About_Us.html, and a myspace

page—and was all created due to the drive and ingenuity of a teenage girl interested in changing ideas about body image.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Critical pedagogues, such as bell hooks and Barry Kanpol, firmly believe that students and teachers should think of “one another as ‘whole’ human beings, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world” (hooks, 1994, p. 14-15). They believe education is about more than just the basics of the three Rs and that schools must take into consideration that they deal with “real people struggling in the everyday world within their multishaped identities and subjectivities” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 33). Building on the ideas of Paulo Freire, critical pedagogues advocate for schools to refocus from teaching subject matter to teaching people.

Though critical pedagogy generally challenges the current educational structure, I advocate for a change that has schools integrate personal student interests with current academic content. Incorporating elements of body image curriculum into classrooms builds on ideas about diversity, tolerance, and social awareness/change while also meeting standards and adding to subject-area knowledge and skills. Plus, body image curriculum attends to the needs of children and adolescents as growing, changing youth in a world that bombards them with ubiquitous messages about expectations of physical appearance.

Even as I write, ABC Family, a cable channel specifically aimed at children and families, is airing an old episode of “Sabrina, The Teenage Witch,” a teen-oriented sitcom that originally aired in the 1990s. In the episode, Sabrina has bought a dress one size too small for the school dance. In order to fit into the dress, Sabrina tosses her breakfast muffin in the trash, skimps on lunch, and buys an assortment of “other realm” diet shakes, including one called “Gaunt Grape.” A male friend comments about the ridiculousness of expectations of beauty in our culture just as he flips open a magazine and delights over a product to prevent hair loss. He later comments on

Sabrina looking too “skinny,” a sentiment echoed by Sabrina’s aunt when Sabrina returns home with her pants barely fitting on her body. Although her aunt offers her some perspective, and tries to help Sabrina understand that her own beauty and the dangers of diet products, Sabrina finds one last package of the Gaunt Grape drink mix and decides that one last drink can’t hurt—but she becomes invisible! In her invisible state, she overhears her peers talking about why they like her—because she cares more about what really matters than about how she looks. Hearing this reminds Sabrina of what is truly important, which restores her to her visible self. Sabrina learned her lesson in the span of thirty minutes with no real consequences. Unfortunately, problems with body image seldom resolve themselves so quickly and rarely without more serious consequences involved.

Schools, according to critical pedagogy, should help students develop as whole individuals, not just as products passing through an assembly line that can pass a test, write a formulaic essay, or solve an equation. Upon leaving school, students become participating members of society, and their success in the “real world” depends on more than what can be assessed on a standardized test. Issues relating to body image have serious implications for students. Disseminated subtly through structures of patriarchy, body image expectations cause all people, not only girls and women, to be judged based upon unrealistic, unattainable expectations that only reflect one aspect of their beings. As a result, students may turn to unhealthy practices in order to meet those standards. Unlike Sabrina, they may not just become temporarily invisible. Dieting, and more severely eating disorders, can lead to a number of substantial health problems, problems that could even have severe, long-term effects. Moreover, if students constantly feel concerned about their appearances, they cannot focus on developing as whole people—emotionally, academically, physically, spiritually, intellectually, interpersonally. Students who

feel constant scrutiny for their appearance, whether the popular princess or the overweight boy in the back row, may even develop issues with their self-esteem which can negatively impact their academic achievement and social functioning. These very real consequences make it imperative for curriculum to address body image.

In the three curricula analyzed, the authors noted the imperative nature of including body image in the curriculum. The Montana public education system recognized the need for body image to be addressed in the curriculum and established the unit for schools throughout the state in order to help combat some body image concerns. All of these authors are on to something. Aware of the implications, they made efforts to help students. But an isolated body image unit or curriculum is not enough. Integrating body image into the current curriculum, especially into core subject areas, allows students to hear the messages repeated and reinforced throughout their school experience, offering students more power in challenging existing standards for appearance. Schools occupy a powerful space in the lives of children and adolescents. During the standard school week, they spend at least a quarter of their days in school. Because schools are responsible for the security and education of children, challenging social issues that impact student health, development, and achievement naturally seems like part of that responsibility. And what better way than to challenge a structure that dictates impossible rules, has the power to oppress all people, and has serious implications for health and well-being?

In the middle school where I used to teach, the school developed a Character Education plan that required teachers to implement lessons and activities focusing on specific values in their classroom. The ultimate hope was that through the lessons and activities on the same theme running throughout the school, students would effectively get the message. Similar principles operate behind integrating body image concepts into the curriculum. And like the Character

Education program, body image education has real world implications for students and teachers. While discrimination against other forms of diversity are illegal and widely accepted as unjust, discrimination, whether personal or institutional, based on body size or physical appearance are generally not monitored—and are often acceptable or even encouraged. This injustice works to keep a number of people oppressed, limiting opportunities and equality for individuals based upon unfair criteria. Much of this oppression is perpetuated by the patriarchy and corporations, imposing arbitrary rules on us. In order to fight these injustices, help develop critical thinking skills, combat the body image status quo, embrace a broader definition of diversity, construct healthy habits and perceptions of body image, and bolster adolescents' assertiveness and self esteem, we must provide students with the knowledge and education that empowers them to challenge the unfair system dictating the value placed on their physical appearance.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Desirae “Desi” Krell was born in 1980 in Tampa, Florida. The oldest of four children, she spent most of her life in and around the Tampa area, graduating from Land O’ Lakes High School in 1998. She earned her B.S. in English education and her M.A. in gifted education from the University of South Florida (USF) in 2002 and 2006, respectively. Along with her B.S. from USF, she graduated cum laude with the USF Honors Program and as a member of the Suncoast Area Teacher Training Honors Program (SCATT).

After graduating with her B.S. in English education and while pursuing her M.A. in gifted education, Desi taught middle school Language Arts and Reading in the Pasco County school system, the same system in which she had attended. During her four years teaching, she developed a passion for working with early adolescents as well as an interest in working with teachers. She often participated in teacher development opportunities and in hosting pre-interns in English and special education from USF during several semesters.

Following her time teaching middle school, Desi left her home in Tampa to begin a graduate program in women’s studies at the University of Florida (UF). During this time, she worked as a teaching assistant in undergraduate classes and a tutor at Huntington Learning Center. Her continued love of teaching and working with children combined with her blossoming feminist interests in the women’s studies program crystallized in a desire to explore body image issues and adolescent girls in the context of school curriculum.

Upon completion of her current program in women’s studies at UF, Desi will enter into a Ph.D program in Education at UF, with a focus on media literacy education.