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## Female Adolescent Body Image and Success at School: A Grounded Theory Approach to Creation of Administrative Best Practice

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FEMALE ADOLESCENT BODY IMAGE AND SUCCESS AT SCHOOL:  
A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO CREATION OF  
ADMINISTRATIVE BEST PRACTICE

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For Doug Murphy, who has paid the most of everyone for this dissertation, and has lingered (quite literally) over every word. Finally, in memory of Dr. Frank Aquila, whose early input helped center my research. I sincerely hope there is a lot of sodium and bad jokes where you are, Dr. Aquila.

“I’ll die for the revolution but don’t ask me not to diet.” -*Esther D. Rothblum*

*Researcher:* How do you define your body?

*Kat:* Gross.

*Researcher:* Why?

*Kat:* Cuz I don’t like...I think the perfect figure is short, she has a tight body, you know what I’m saying. I don’t feel like I’m that. I mean I’m tall and I’m chub.

## ABSTRACT

At present, school administrators do not have necessary information to create a school environment where teenage girls unhappy with their bodies can experience success at school. This research surrounds three research questions:

1. How do adolescent girls' definitions of their bodies relate to their perception of their high school's climate?
2. How does the manner in which adolescent female girls define their bodies relate to their success in school?
3. What is the nature of adolescent girls' and high school administrators' perceptions of how adolescent girls' body image influences administrative practice?

Four school administrators and ten high school girls were interviewed. During semi-structured interviews, participants answered questions about their experiences with body images in the context of a midwestern urban high school. Data were analyzed using grounded theory methodology, a qualitative research method where inductive creation of theory is the goal.

The data demonstrated that girls construct a complex and dynamic "body illusion" composed of the types of clothing they may wear, social comparison and changes experienced with their bodies. This body illusion is variable based upon three distorting factors: input from others, culture and mood. As a result of a girl's body illusion, she may behave a certain way in school; a girl with a negative body illusion may disengage from her school work.

The data showed that students with poor body illusions may be helped by certain best practices by school administrators. First, body-based bullying of students with poor body illusions or above or below average weights is commonplace and largely unaddressed. Anti-bullying programs must be inclusive of this issue. Next, school lunches are highly caloric and unappealing to students. This encourages unhealthy behaviors such as indulgence, meal skipping and unhealthy substitution. School administrators should focus on the quality of school lunches. Third, school uniform policies serve to make girls with negative body illusions feel uncomfortable while they do little to improve achievement. They should be evaluated for their effectiveness. Finally, health, physical education and family and consumer sciences curricula should include mental and physical fitness attributes but give positive reinforcement to students.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The drama of high school has been fodder for television, movies and literature for years. The messages that are sent seem dichotomous; some media focuses on the popular kids with the perfect bodies and well-adjusted lives, while other media features the odd, awkward kids who do not have athletic bodies. Fiction is exactly that, yet one may wonder what really happens to the kids in high school who are too “something” to fit in. What about too fat? As educators, one may wonder if there is more to not fitting in than comedic value. Can “feeling fat” in a high school have an effect on one’s success at school and if so, how is that different than actually “being fat”?

Research demonstrates that the cost of being obese is very high. First, obesity is stigmatized in society, largely because it is viewed by most as being controllable. (DeJong, 1980). As a result of this stigmatization, obesity has serious social ramifications that function comparably to the results of racism; those who are obese receive less education, make less money and are less likely to marry (Gortmaker, Must & Perrin, 1993; Crosnoe, Frank & Muller, 2008).

The social stigmatization of obesity has ramifications for people who are not obese or even at-risk of becoming obese. There are a large number of people in the United States who are “weightist;” people who appear thin and undervalue those who

appear obese or overweight (Steiner-Adair, 1994, p. 384). Therefore, many Americans have a “looking glass self;” they self appraise their own bodies based on how others treat and react to them (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004). This reinforces the idea that obesity is not just a number, it is also a psychological phenomena. People who are not obese may categorize themselves as such, based on the social feedback they receive.

Warren, Gleaves, Cepeda-Bonito, Fernandez and Rodriguez-Ruiz (2005) state that a very thin body is considered the norm in the US. This creates an atmosphere where women are constantly comparing themselves to other women and dissatisfied with the results of this comparison. Hutchinson (1994) says that as a result, women’s bodies in the US are seen as both something to worship and something to hold in contempt. This idea is then reinforced by the mass media. Therefore, there is a culturally thin ideal.

Self appraisal as obese and internalization of the need to be thin is not universal in the US. Culture can provide a shielding mechanism. In places where food is scarce, there is a preference for larger bodies (Popenoe, 2005). Race can serve as a protective shield against body image dissatisfaction. Within the US, African American and Latino women have different relationships with their bodies than do Caucasian women. According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2003), acceptance of extra weight in African American culture is historically rooted in the image of a “Mammy.” Today, large African American women are valued by society as strong, while Caucasian women are referred to in discourse as thin and sexual. (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003). Yet, African American teenage females still express a desire to be thinner. Hesse-Biber, Howling, Leavy and Lovejoy (2004) found that when asked to describe an ideal body type, the girls described a more

curvaceous or “thick” ideal, however when asked what they would like to look like, the girls did indicate a desire to be somewhat smaller.

For Mexican American women, a larger body type is also considered desirable (Warren et al., 2005). Both Mexican American and Spanish women can describe the culturally prescribed body type in the US, however they strive to adhere to it at a lower level than do Caucasian women.

While race serves as something of a protection against body image dissatisfaction, being adolescent has the opposite effect. Robinson (2006) argues that while many of the effects of obesity are health related, those issues typically do not manifest until later in life. However according to her, the most immediate effects of obesity manifest in childhood and adolescence and those are the psychosocial difficulties. For example, Crosnoe, Frank and Mueller (2008) found that teenagers who were obese were less likely to have friends than were their normal weight peers. These types of psychosocial problems with obesity are what drives adolescents to attempt weight loss. Gilman (2008) states that these efforts are often unhealthy and futile and are related to more weight issues as adults.

Adolescent girls are the most vulnerable to weight-based dissatisfaction. One reason is that girls at this age are highly influenced by their peers, and are therefore more susceptible to weight-based teasing (Robinson, 2006). Another is that adolescence means rapid growth, which leads to rapid weight gain (Kilborn, 1994). For girls, this growth spurt means an increase in body fat percentage (Kilborn, 1994). Hesse-Biber et al. (2006), cite this as a reason why two thirds of teenage girls are trying to lose weight.

They also state that school is one of the places where this weight dissatisfaction is reinforced (Hesse-Biber et al., 2006).

Because of the increases of obesity, the societally acceptable stigmatization of it, the war on weight and teenagers' susceptibility to it, it is absolutely crucial that this issue be addressed in high schools. Haines, Neumark-Sztainer and Thiel (2006) state that teasing, body image issues and physical activity are all salient issues in schools for overweight students. According to Fox and Farrow (2009), social interaction at school worsened the difficulties faced for obese children. Administrators must take educated and measured actions to understand and serve teenage girls whose body dissatisfaction leads them to pursue a culturally thin ideal. Curtis (2006) outlines some of these effects and they include bullying, especially in physical education classes and the lunchroom.

As a result, some schools are launching programs to combat weight issues in school. However, these programs are not always good solutions. Russell-Mayhew (2006) points out that the first obstacle in creating a program in a school centered on weight is determining what issues are to be addressed. This sounds simple, however, many administrators charged with creating this type of program do not agree on the issue. Creating a program warning against obesity can have the effect of making students more sensitive about their weights than they should be or even encouraging eating disorders, while happy at any size programs are sometimes seen as complacency regarding obesity (Russell-Mayhew, 2006).

### *Problem Statement*

This research will address the problem that school administrators do not have information as to how adolescent teenage girls with body image issues function in a high school and whether their functionality is meaningfully different from students who do not have negative body images.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how teenage girls conceptualize their bodies within the context of a large urban public high school in a mid-sized Midwestern city and determine what implications those conceptualizations have on their learning. Most practically, this study will investigate the ways in which the girls' success at school intersects, if at all, with adolescent females' body image. The data collected from the participants will be used to formulate a theory that describes the relationships between adolescent females' body image, the quest for a culturally thin ideal and participants' school successes within the context of a high school. In addition, this study will make concrete recommendations for high school administrators as to the best tactics for facilitating success at school for female students with body image issues.

However, the research has yet to tie these issues together. There is little information as to what the pursuit of a culturally thin ideal has to do with success at school. If there are societal effects, and schools are a microcosm of society, then there may be a phenomena at the nexus of a cultural ideal of thinness and schools. Therefore, this research investigates the problem that little is known about how body image affects school success or how it is administratively handled in high schools.



### *Research Questions*

1. How do adolescent girls' definitions of their bodies relate to their perception of their high school's climate?
2. How does the manner in which adolescent female girls define their bodies relate to their success in school?
3. What is the nature of adolescent girls' and high school administrators' perceptions of how adolescent girls' body image influences administrative practice?

### *Significance of Study*

One of the major concerns of health professionals in this country is the prevalence of obesity. In Ohio, by 2018, current trends project that more than 50% of Ohioans will be obese (Ali, 2010). These numbers refer to a medical condition with serious implications, however, obesity is not just a number, rather it is a condition that has psychological implications.

Within schools, there is evidence that obesity relates to bullying; both in that those who are obese are more likely to bully and be bullied. This is a major issue in schools today, as bullying lawsuits become more commonplace. In 2009, a couple in Mentor, Ohio filed a lawsuit against the schools after their son committed suicide (James, 2009). The student was harassed in school, especially during math class, and the parents allege that no school officials attempted to intervene and protect their son. This couple has joined together with three other sets of parents of students who committed suicide at Mentor High School as a result of bullying (Associated Press, 2010). The lawsuit is

pending, as the Ohio Supreme Court analyzes state statutes that relate to the allegations (Associated Press, 2010). This pending litigation shows that bullying is a serious matter for administrators to consider, and the relationship between bullying and weight issues is an important one to explore.

Therefore, this issue is not going away. As students get bigger and at the same time pursue a culturally thin ideal, schools must adapt to ensure that all of their students are experiencing success at school. This study is significant because it is a step in a clear definition of the interaction of a culturally thin ideal and school success. In addition, it analyzes administrative actions to ensure that recommendations for administrative best practice will enhance the success for female adolescents caught in the pursuit of a culturally thin ideal.

### *Definitions*

*African American*<sup>1</sup>: Anyone who comes from or has ancestral roots in sub Saharan Africa and/or who considers him or herself “Black.”

*BMI*: Body Mass Index. Referred to as BMI; a number calculated from a person’s height and weight that is used to diagnose weight problems.

*Body Image*: This term refers to the picture of one’s own body she has in her mind. This is also compared to a “looking glass self.”

*Body Illusion*: The dynamic image of one’s body that is made up of social comparison, clothing and experienced changes in body shape. The body illusion may be distorted by culture, mood and input from others.

*Caucasian*: Anyone who comes from or has ancestral roots in a Western nation that considers him or herself “White.”

*Culturally Thin Ideal*: an image of female perfection created by peers, media, culture and/or health professionals that Western women strive to emulate. For the purposes of this research, this means that a female should fit into a single digit pants size, have a very flat stomach, and wear a size small shirt. She should not be too tall or too short.

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<sup>1</sup> Participants self identified their race and ethnicity. Their words were used to describe themselves on the individual level, however the general definitions provided above will be used when talking about a group.

*Hispanic*: Anyone who comes from or has ancestral roots in a Spanish speaking nation (excluding Spain). For the purposes of this study, these students will largely have roots in Puerto Rico..

*Looking Glass Self*: Term coined by Crosnoe and Muller (2004) to describe body image. This term will be used and expanded upon later in this dissertation.

*Obese*: 1. Anyone with a Body Mass Index greater than 25 as defined by the Center For Disease Control. 2. A perception, self directed or outwardly directed, that someone is extremely overweight. This second definition of obesity is similar to the term “fat.”

*SATAQ*: Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire. This is the instrument that was used to select the participants for this study.

*Success at School*: This term encompasses several aspects of high school life: 1. Academic achievement: This term can be measured by grade point average, progress on standardized tests, progress toward graduation and/or accumulation of credits. 2. Adjustment: This refers to how much a student enjoys coming to school, fits in with others, how well she interacts with teachers and other school personnel, her behavior in class and/or how comfortable she feels in the school setting. 3. Level of connection with the school: Students who connect with the school are there for more than just learning; they attend school events, participate in extra-curriculars and spend extra time on miscellaneous activities throughout the building.

*War on Weight:* refers to the idea that where people who are not cosmetically or medically overweight are fearful of becoming fat.

*Weightist:* The idea that people who are perceived as in shape, or perceive themselves as in shape discriminate against those who they perceive as obese.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In July of 2004, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson, stated that Medicare would now consider obesity a “disease” (Gilman, 2008). This announcement is part of a trend that treats obesity as an epidemic today. The numbers within the United States back up this epidemic categorization. The prevalence of obesity is increasing in the United States (Ogden, Carroll, Curtin, McDowell, Tabak & Flegal, 2006). In 2004, about 17 percent of adolescents and children were overweight and about 32% of adults were obese (Ogden, et al., 2006). If trends continue as expected, by 2018 Ohio could be one of six states where the population of obese people is over 50 percent (Ali, 2010).

In research, obesity tends to be defined in medical terms. According to Crosnoe and Muller (2004), Body Mass Index (BMI) is the most common method for studying obesity. BMI is a function of one’s height and weight (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004). For adults, anyone with a BMI higher than 25 is considered overweight and higher than 30 is considered obese (CDC, 2010). This definition is slightly different for children and adolescents because it takes into account differences for age and gender (CDC, 2010).

However, the idea of obesity solely as an epidemic disease or a number is problematic. In his cultural study of obesity, author Sander Gilman says, “Obesity is not itself a ‘disease’ but rather a phenomenological category which reflects the visible manifestation of bodily size, which in turn can have multiple causes (p. 18). Gilman’s point is that obesity is not properly defined medically. It is a broader phenomenon that cannot be conceptualized by a number. Overweight, heavy, obese, fat, or any other word for it, is more of a symbol of what society says people should or should not look like (Kulick & Machado-Borges, 2005).

Hutchinson (1994) argues that body image is a product of one’s imagination. She defines body image as:

“The image of the body that allows a person to know about emotions, sensations, bodily needs, and appetites, and to negotiate the physical environment; it is the image of the body a person hears about as she listens to her inner speech.” (Hutchinson, 1994, p. 153)

This concept, according to her, is unfortunately named, as body image has nothing to do with what an outside observer sees. There is no objectivity to body image, further, as a result of media exposure, body image and reality are often confused (Hesse-Biber, 1996). Therefore, how a person feels about his or her body is much different than what a scale or a BMI chart say.

Crosnoe, Frank and Mueller (2008) argue that the definition of obesity as purely physical is inadequate. This is because the stigmatization of obesity is so strong that it affects more than just people with obesity; individuals who are overweight, larger than average, or even just average are also likely to feel social ramifications (Crosnoe, Frank

& Mueller, 2008). Gortmaker, Must and Perrin (1993) did an analysis of 10,039 adolescents' BMI, later educational attainment, social status, health and economic status. After follow up seven years later, the researchers found that the female subjects who were initially in the 95th or higher percentile of BMI were significantly less likely to be married, had lower household incomes and fewer years of education seven years later. These results were analyzed further for correlates to health conditions that would adversely affect the relevant social measures and found no relationship. Therefore, the social costs of obesity are high at a young age. These results hold true overseas, as well. Laitinen, Power, Ek, Sovio and Jarvelin (2002) measured the BMI of a Finnish cohort at 14 years old and 31 years old and found that among the girls, being overweight at 14 was associated with lower school performance and less likelihood to marry later in life.

It is because of this evidence that Crosnoe, Frank and Mueller (2008) point out that though body size is often considered a health or physical condition, its social implications function more similarly to race. They argue that this physical characteristic, like skin color, has been used to construct a social hierarchy in the United States. According to Steiner-Adair (1994) people in the United States are "weightist" (p. 384). This means that people overvalue those who appear thin and undervalue those who appear to be overweight or obese. She states that children as young as three years old associate negative qualities with people who are overweight (Steiner-Adair, 1994). As a result, overweight people have to deal with the psychological effects of prejudice. This interferes with normal development, especially of teenage girls (Steiner-Adair, 1994).



Though the author cites these psychological effects of prejudice on teenage girls, she does not make the link to a school setting.

Crosnoe and Muller (2004) argue that a more social definition of obesity is useful in determining its role in life course development. They define this as a “looking glass self,” where one self appraises based on what she or he sees and how others react to him or her. This definition is manifested in a quote from a participant in Hesse-Biber et al.’s (2006) study about women and thinness: “I think I have to please men if I want to get a date, if I want to be married, if I want anything, and so how I appear to men is really my final (weight) goal, like if I’m going to get married or be an old maid.” (208) This participant did not define her weight by a number but by whatever image a man would desire her. Too big (higher number) was equivalent to an old maid, while smaller (lower number) was equivalent to marriage and happiness.

### *The War on Weight and Culture*

The definition of obesity varies by culture and place. According to Popenoe (2005), areas of the world which have no food insecurity place a negative connotation on obesity and the people there show a preference for thin bodies. Therefore, the idea of obesity as bad or a “disease” is only found in more industrialized and Western countries. In fact, 80 percent of societies throughout history have had a preference for larger women (Popenoe, 2005).

In the United States, the idea that obese is bad and thin is good is pervasive. Warren, Gleaves, Cepeda-Bonito, Fernandez and Rodriguez-Ruiz (2005) argue that in the US, “An ultrathin body is presented as normative and attainable for women.” (p. 241)

This results in an atmosphere where women in the US are culturally predisposed to compare themselves to others and experience dissatisfaction with their self assessments (Warren et al., 2005). This dissatisfaction can be quantified; media models are an average of 20% underweight, while those who are 15% underweight meet one of the DSM-IV-TR criteria for anorexia nervosa (Dittmar & Howard, 2004).

This comparison results in unhealthy behavior. Hesse-Biber (1996) argues that the strict adherence to a culturally thin ideal by many women mimics a cult. According to her, the basic behavior that is associated with a cult is ritualism and obsession with a goal or ideal. For the “Cult of Thinness,” as Hesse-Biber calls it, the object of the obsession is the perfect body. The ritual behavior is the strict adherence to dieting fads, programs and workouts. Often, these rituals are extreme. She cites the Atkins Diet as an example. It was a fad at the beginning of the millennium and still has adherents today. This “ritual” requires its followers to completely forgo all carbohydrates in favor of high fat, high cholesterol meats in order to put the body in ketosis, where because of a lack of sugar fat is burned (Atkins, 2002).

Hutchinson (1994) says that women have a troubled relationship with their bodies as a result of a “culture that is sick” (p. 153). In this culture, women learn to blame their bodies for everything that goes wrong in their lives and allow these negative body images to define life. Hutchinson (1994) argues that a patriarchal culture has defined for women that their bodies are at once of contempt and worship; a definition which led to a distortion of reality. These images are now defined by mass media where they were once values that were transmitted through community and parents. As a result, the continued

objectification of women's bodies leads to a lack of empowerment for women (Hutchinson, 1994).

However, the source of thin ideal internalization is not isolated to mass media. According to Krones, Stice, Batres and Orjada (2005), when adolescent girls compare themselves to peers, they are more likely to experience body type dissatisfaction. Using first year students at a university as subjects, the researchers separated the participants into two groups. Each group had a "confederate," or a girl that performed the tasks with the subjects but was not part of the test groups. One confederate fit the cultural thin ideal; she was 5 foot 8 and weighed 125 pounds. The other girl was 5 foot 4 and weighed 140 pounds. The authors found that the girls who were in the group with the thin ideal confederate had significantly higher levels of body dissatisfaction and desire to change their bodies (Krones et al., 2005).

The pursuit of a culturally thin ideal in the United States is not universal. The internalization of being overweight differs across races. In her work analyzing the connection between conceptualization of African American women as both strong and large by society, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2003) demonstrates that the acceptance of extra weight by Black women is a historically rooted phenomenon. She argues that this stems from the image of a "Mammy" and continues today as a piece of African American women's perceived strength (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003). There is a cultural reverence for the large, strong African American woman, while there is less of a categorization for a smaller Black woman. In fact, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2003) states that African American women represent a "deviant womanhood," and can be lost without their image as strong.

(p. 111) Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2003) also points out that discourse about Caucasian women categorizes them as “thin, white and sexual.” (p. 113)

Hesse-Biber, Howling, Leavy and Lovejoy (2004) conducted open-ended interviews with 78 African American girls from poor and low income backgrounds and found that body image was not a significant part of how they viewed themselves. The girls were asked to identify their body type from eight pictures and identify the body type they would most like to resemble. The researchers found, like Caucasian females, that the girls expressed a wish to be thinner, however the gap between actual weight and desired weight was smaller for the African American girls. Despite a wish to be somewhat thinner, the girls stated that men did not want thin women and that the most desirable body type was what they described as “thick,” or “curvaceous with large hips, a rounded backside, and ample thighs.” (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004, p. 55) Most of the girls in the study reported that they had never been on a diet, even if they had been teased about their weights (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004). The subjects described appearance as manipulable and dependent on personality, in the way that one carries herself and her confidence. The most important factor in appearance satisfaction was “working with what you have.” (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004, p. 57)

Perhaps related to these cultural differences in the meaning of body size and image is the fact that obesity is more prevalent among African Americans (Boardman, Saint Onge, Rogers & Den, 2005). In addition, obesity is more prevalent in neighborhoods of lower socioeconomic status (Boardman et al., 2005). In a study analyzing data from the National Center for Health Statistics, Boardman et al. (2005)

found that prevalence of obesity is related to place. Because obesity is more prevalent among African Americans and among those with lower socioeconomic statuses, people who live in inner city areas are significantly more at risk for obesity than those who do not (Boardman et al., 2005).

Warren et al. (2005) posit that though Mexico is a Western nation, that culture idealizes a larger physique than does that of the United States. Therefore, Mexican American women are aware of a thin ideal, yet their ethnicity serves as a protective force against the ritual behaviors described by Hesse-Biber (1996). Warren et al. (2005) used two instruments to show that ethnicity does have a relationship with degree of body satisfaction. The researchers gave the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-R), which measures the degree to which people accept media created body standards, to White, Mexican American and Spanish female college freshman. Participants also completed the Body Shape Questionnaire, a measure of one's satisfaction with h/her own body. The researchers found that the relationship between awareness of a culturally prescribed body ideal and body dissatisfaction was significantly higher among Caucasian participants than either Spanish or Mexican American participants (Warren et al., 2005).

### *Weight and Stigma*

As the weight of Americans has increased, so has the media coverage about obesity. In an analysis of obesity related news items over a decade, Kim and Willis (2007) found an increase in the number of journal articles that discuss obesity as a societal problem. Further, they report that these articles tend to blame individuals for the

cause of obesity first and societal changes, such as fast food and more indoor living, second (Kim & Willis, 2007). The articles were least likely to discuss genetic and other uncontrollable facets of obesity (Kim & Willis, 2007). Still, one third of children and adolescents with obesity have metabolic syndrome, which is heavily dependent on family history (Barkai, Molnar & Paragh, 2007). According to DeJong (1980), physical deviance, such as obesity, is assessed by outsiders in terms of controllability. For instance, someone with a physical deformity attributed to a birth defect is more positively viewed than someone who is obese, because the obesity is perceived as controllable (DeJong, 1980).

People with weight problems are stigmatized in society and this stigmatization can affect how one self appraises (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004). Despite evidence that controllability of weight is a complicated issue, obese people are more likely to report incidences of day to day discrimination than are their average weight counterparts (Carr & Friedman, 2005). Carr and Friedman (2005) state that individuals with a socially devalued attribute, such as obesity, are more likely to experience discrimination. They explored the perceptions and instances of discrimination among adults who are considered underweight, normal weight, overweight, obese I (30-34.9 BMI), and obese II/III (BMI 35 and over). The researchers found that individuals who were obese II and III were more likely to report daily discrimination (Carr & Friedman, 2005). Some of the discrimination experiences were interpersonal and some were institutional, relating to employment. According to Carr and Friedman (2005), this discrimination can have adverse effects on socioeconomic status, and physical and mental health.

The stigmatization of people who are obese can include specific effects. According to Bannon, Hunter-Reel, Wilson and Karlin (2009), this includes risk of depression, economic hardship, social withdrawal, overeating and poor psychosocial functioning. Again, the researchers point to controllability as the source of the stigma. They state that the perception of obesity as psychologically controlled, rather than biologically, results in more stigmatization. The more psychologically controllable people believe obesity to be, the more they will hold people personally accountable for being obese (Bannon et al., 2009).

#### *The War on Weight and Teenage Girls*

Crosnoe, Frank and Mueller (2008) studied the effect of BMI on high school social networks. Their subjects were asked to “nominate” up to five girls and five boys as friends. They found that students with the highest level BMIs had the fewest friendship nominations, and that relationship was stronger for the girls. In addition, they found that the students with higher BMIs engaged in homophily, or associating with others who were a similar physical type to their own. This helps explain why these students were also less likely to nominate friends. The study demonstrates a social cost of obesity for adolescents, especially girls.

An understanding of obesity and its implications for children and adolescents is crucial. Again, many of the studies out there are using numbers to define weight. However, for adolescents, the medical consequences of obesity that are associated with those numbers are sometimes overshadowed by more immediate issues. Medical problems often do not manifest until adulthood, while the social costs of being

overweight are immediate (Robinson, 2006). “The most common and immediate consequences of being overweight are psychosocial.” (Robinson, 2006, p. 202.) Children as young as seven are exhibiting signs of adult-like body dissatisfaction and are knowledgeable about dieting (Gilman, 2008). Studies show that children who participate in weight loss activities are more likely to be overweight as adolescents and adults (Gilman, 2008). The stigma of obesity is stronger among younger people and this means that obesity may impair the functioning of adolescents (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004).

Adolescent girls are the most vulnerable to the stigma of obesity and the problems that may result. Girls at this age are most influenced by their peers (Robinson, 2006). As a result, they are more susceptible to weight-based teasing than are other demographic groups (Robinson, 2006). Kilborn (1994) cites other reasons for the particular sensitivity of adolescent girls to the stigma of obesity. First of all, peer pressure is strongest at this age. In addition, the changes in the body during adolescence can result in weight gain and increase in size over a short period of time. For adolescent girls, this means an increase in their body fat percentage. Kilborn (1994) argues that boys at this age are encouraged to grow bigger and stronger, while girls are encouraged to get smaller, despite the fact that their biology determines that they will grow larger. Perhaps as a result, two-thirds of girls from ages 13-18 are trying to lose weight. Hesse-Biber et al. (2006) argue that young women become susceptible to this “pursuit of a cultural ideal of thinness” and develop disordered eating habits (208). This quest for a thin ideal is reinforced in several places, including school (Hesse-Biber et al., 2006).



### *The War on Weight and the Role of School Administrators*

School administrators have a precarious and multi-layered role in the lives of students chasing the thin ideal. According to Fox and Farrow (2009), social interaction at school exacerbated the difficulties faced for obese children. Haines, Neumark-Sztainer and Thiel (2006) state that teasing, body image issues and, to a lesser extent, physical activity were cited by school staff as the major issues for students in the area of weight. Some schools are implementing programs that address eating disorders and/or obesity. The literature shows that this can do harm to students who have body image sensitivity when the programs are not properly administered and supervised. Therefore, administrators must not take these programs lightly; before launching a healthy weight program in a school, much research and training are crucial.

Though teenage girls are at such a crucial age in body image sensitivity, school personnel get little or no training in the area of eating disorders, obesity prevention or nutrition (Yager & O’Dea, 2005). According to Russell-Mayhew (2006), this is a gray area, because there is a lack of agreement as to the actual issue. Obesity prevention can be seen as a dangerous invitation to eating disorders, while efforts to prevent eating disorders may be perceived as complacency about obesity. Even though obesity is only one aspect of health, Russell-Mayhew cites a dangerous “war on weight” (2006, p. 255) where people who are not cosmetically or medically overweight are fearful of becoming fat. Therefore, programs implemented in schools without proper administrative training and research are potentially dangerous when not properly implemented because they can

increase the behaviors and attitudes that they were created to prevent (Russell-Mayhew, 2006).

Hence, school administrators should be cognizant of side affects when implementing a program encouraging healthy behavior. One solution to this is to have preventative programs early on in adolescence that target stressors that trigger body image dissatisfaction (McVey, Davis, Tweed & Shaw, 2004). This type of program encourages self-esteem, fosters knowledge of natural body changes during puberty and focuses on resiliency factors for students (McVey et al., 2004). However, in a study of the effects of this type of program on sixth grade girls, McVey et al. (2004) found that there was no significant difference between girls who had this program implemented in their health classes and those who did not.

Another strategy school administrators may consider utilizing is an integrated approach to all types of eating disorders (Haines et al., 2006). Treatment of obesity, eating disorders, body image issues and other forms of weight-based problems tend to be similar psychologically, so the integrated approach is effective (Haines et al., 2006). Despite the evidence that the integrated approach works and the economic advantage of combining these interventions, few schools have adopted this type of program (Haines et al., 2006). Therefore, this is one area for school administrators to improve programs in their buildings.

Curtis (2006) did a qualitative study of the effects of the National Healthy School Programme (HSP) on obese teenage girls in England. The HSP is part of a global school health initiative started by the World Health Organization. HSP stressed physical

exercise and healthy eating. The girls that participated in the study were asked about their experiences with Physical Education (PE) classes, healthy eating and emotional well-being. Curtis found that all of the students had experienced bullying. In particular, they reported being taunted during PE. The girls were called names such as “earthquake” and cited a strong reluctance to change in the locker room before class. Several of the participants reported avoiding PE by faking illnesses or injuries and did so with the encouragement of teachers and parents that were trying to alleviate the bullying.

Curtis (2006) also found that the girls were victimized in the lunchroom. Here, it was a lose-lose situation. One participant noted that she was afraid to eat in the cafeteria because other students would point at her and say, “watch her stuff her face,” no matter what she ate (Curtis, 2006, p. 413). Another girl hated eating apples at school because every time she did, students would ask her if she was on a diet. For one student, the bullying became so bad that she refused to go to school until her mother was taken to court.

Curtis’ study shows that all of the obese adolescent girls that she interviewed had been victimized by peers, however she was unable to determine whether or not the magnitude of the phenomenon was related to the HSP. However, there is evidence that obese students and students who are self conscious about their weight are more susceptible to both being bullies and being bullied. Therefore, another role for school administrators is in understanding the relationship between weight and a hostile school climate for students and taking the necessary actions. This is an important role, as

students who are bullied are more likely to develop anxiety and social phobias as adults (Miller & Vaillancourt, 2007).

Robinson (2006) defines weight-based peer victimization as unsolicited bullying and teasing as a result of being overweight or obese. She states that obese girls reported higher rates of weight-based peer victimization than did their normal weight counterparts. Obese girls also experienced bullying in the form of social exclusion, as they were not asked to participate in social activities (Robinson, 2006). 30% of girls and 25% of boys are teased about weight by peers at school and 29% of girls and 16% of boys are teased about weight by family members (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Story, 2003).

Janssen, Craig, Boyce and Pickett (2004) found that among 11-16 year olds, there is a relationship between BMI and bullying. Among all those surveyed, subjects who were categorized as obese by their BMIs were more likely to be bullies. For girls 13-14 and 15-16 years of age, obesity was associated with increased victimization. This research shows the importance of understanding the relationship between weight and aggression in school, as being bullied or being a bully has serious psychological ramifications later in life (Janssen et al., 2004).

However, BMI itself is not the only aspect of bullying that can be related to weight. Girls chasing a thin ideal may also be more vulnerable than their peers. Miller and Vaillancourt (2007) found that students who had higher levels socially prescribed perfectionism, or “the perceived need to attain standards and expectations prescribed by significant others,” were more more likely to recall verbal victimization by peers.

Therefore, the authors state that the girls who internalize verbal bullying were more likely

to hold themselves to a standard created by others. The importance here is that this type of perfectionism is most related to interpersonal distress, where as internal perfectionism is associated with higher achievement (Miller & Vaillancourt, 2007). The authors do not deconstruct what constitutes socially prescribed perfectionism, therefore there is not an indication of a certain effect for chasing a perfect body.

It is important to consider the interactions that these girls are having with their peers because these relationships have a relationship with students' academic adjustment (DeRosier, 2004). How should administrators handle this challenge? Robinson (2006) makes several recommendations. First, administrators can implement programs like S.S. GRIN, a social skills group intervention, which focuses on improving students' skills in social interaction. Students who participate in S.S. GRIN report high levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy and lower social anxiety (DeRosier, 2004). In addition, S.S. GRIN promotes greater peer liking (DeRosier, 2004). The program used didactic instruction and active practice to build social skills. Some of the activities that S.S. GRIN includes are role-playing, modeling, hands-on activities (DeRosier, 2004). These programs help students with self-confidence, social relationships, self-esteem, self-efficacy and anxiety levels.

Second, administrators must find resources and trained personnel for social intervention programs. Robinson (2006) also advises administrators to ensure that activities are properly supervised so that students are not victimized, provide professional development for teachers to help them recognize when students are being bullied and to create a school climate intolerant of peer victimization.

Third, administrators must play an active role in preventing victimization and bullying (Robinson, 2006). They may do this by displaying signs around the school promoting a safe social environment, making it clear to all faculty and staff that any instances of peer victimization must be reported and creating clear consequences for those who victimize (Robinson, 2006).

Haines et al. (2006) analyzed responses on a questionnaire about students and weight-based issues from students, parents and school staff and made suggestions for schools to help students remedy these problems. One of the more salient issues for all parties was weight-based teasing. Therefore, some recommendations for administrators were to make the school a place for all body types to be accepted and to crack down on weight-based teasing. In addition, administrators should focus on older students to be role models for younger students (Haines et al., 2006). School staff should also use famous role models as examples of different body types, educate students as to what it feels like to be teased, and provide support for students who are being teased or bullied (Haines et al., 2006).

### *Success at School*

School success is an important predictor of successful socialization after high school, increased income, better health and job security (deBruyn, Dekovic & Meijnen, 2003). The degree to which a student is successful in high school can be dependent on self-esteem (deBruyn et al., 2003). This is an important point for this research, as the literature shows self-esteem issues to be a major result of body image dissatisfaction (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004; Curtis, 2006; Hesse-Biber et al., 2006).

There is no one definition of what makes a student “successful,” however, there are many studies, as this one, that attempt to find how the student becomes a success. Bowen, Rose, Powers and Glennie (2008) define school success as trouble avoidance, grades and school engagement. The authors found that social variables were important for students to be successful. Somers, Owens and Piliawsky (2008) found that there is a correlation between social support and grades. Students with support from peers, teachers and parents had higher levels of educational commitment, grades and identification of the personal value of education (Somers et al., 2008).

Students who have positive parental, peer and neighborhood influences have higher rates of school success (Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2008). Students with a greater degree of group acceptance were more likely to be successful. In addition, hours spent with the family was positively associated with school success variables (Bowen et al., 2008).

Brigman and Campbell (2003) defined student success by defining clusters of skills that led students down the right path. They identified these skills as: ability of metacognition (ability to set goals), progress monitoring, memory skills, interpersonal skills (ability to listen and work in a team), and self management skills (managing attention, motivation and anger). According to the authors all of those skills lead to increases in academic achievement for students who have them versus those who do not (Brigman & Campbell, 2003).

deBruyn et al. (2003) defined school success as only Grade Point Average (GPA); however the researchers identified some elements which were closely tied to GPA. For

example, the research stated that adolescents' abilities to set positive goals were crucial in being successful in school, or maintaining a high GPA. Classroom behavior was also important. This is divided into two areas: academic and social. Students who engaged more academically in the class were more likely to be successful. Socially, students have to engage with new teachers, students and friends successfully in order to translate that into school success (deBruyn, 2003). Spoth, Shin and Randall (2008) also define school success strictly in terms of academics, however they point to academic and school engagement as a direct predictor of school success. Low levels of attachment, or engagement in the school were predictors of tardiness and frequency of absence, which in turn directly effect school success (Spoth et al., 2008).

In a study of what makes Puerto Rican students successful, Irizarry and Antrop-Gonzalez (2007) had a less stringent definition of school success. They defined the term as a student who had not dropped out of school at any time (a severe problem for Puerto Rican students), was in at least the 11th or 12th grade (many drop out in the 10th grade) and had at least a 3.0 grade point average. The researchers found that students who exhibited school success had a safe and supportive peer group and were more likely to be involved in extra curricular activities, particularly sports (Irizarry & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2007).

Because the literature shows that students who are obese are stigmatized, the evidence of peer acceptance as a factor in school success is important. If peers are casting dispersions on students who are overweight, then this may have an effect on their school success. In addition, this pressure may affect those who are not obese because of



the literature's claim of a "war on weight" or fear of obesity (Russell-Mayhew, 2006). These studies show that it is crucial to examine school success for students struggling with body image, especially if they perceive themselves to be overweight or are overweight. This is because the literature demonstrates a steep social cost of having weight problems. Study after study has shown that people who obese are stigmatized and that this stigmatization can lead to social costs such as having fewer friends and being victimized by peers. Yet, social capital was shown to be an important factor for school success measured in three different ways. Therefore, it is necessary to determine whether school success is affected by body image; both as an internal inhibition and as a result of external discrimination.

### *Research Questions*

Scholarly research shows that social factors are important for school success. Despite the evidence that a growing population of people in the United States are obese and that the idea of a culturally thin ideal is prevalent in this country, there is little research that explores the connection between body image and school success. It is known that adolescent girls are the most sensitive group about their bodies, however there is little evidence what the gap between a culturally thin ideal and the reality (or perceived reality) of their bodies does to their school success. Research has not yet been able to describe what the nexus between the importance of a culturally thin ideal and the failure of many teens to achieve it means for their high school experience.

School administrators are lacking the information they need as to what to do for females who are fighting a war on weight. There is not enough information for school

administrators to successfully build a safe, healthy environment for students with body image issues to achieve school success. Therefore, this study seeks to remedy that by answering the following questions:

1. How do adolescent girls' definitions of their bodies relate to their perception of their high school's climate?
2. How does the manner in which adolescent female girls define their bodies relate to their success in school?
3. What is the nature of adolescent girls' and high school administrators' perceptions of how adolescent girls' body image influences administrative practice?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Introduction*

For school administrators, it is crucial to create learning environments conducive for all students. For many adolescent teenage girls, body image is a salient issue and one that perhaps can affect their learning. As indicated in the literature review (Hutchison, 1994; Krone et al., 2005; Robinson, 2006; Crosnoe, Frank & Muller, 2008), there is evidence that adolescent females are prone to body image dissatisfaction based on a culturally thin ideal. This preoccupation with their bodies can be psychologically distressing and cause unhealthy or even ritualistic behavior aimed at meeting society's standard of beauty. (Hesse-Biber, 1996).

In addition, research has shown that students who are overweight are more prone to being bullied or becoming bullies at school (Robinson, 2006). This can manifest itself in many places in the school environment, including the cafeteria, physical education class and health classes (Curtis, 2006). Some girls who felt that they had been subject to weight based peer victimization even stopped going to school until their parents had to appear before court (Curtis, 2006).

Despite the two fields of literature based evidence mentioned above, research has not yet demonstrated whether or not there is a connection between body image and students' school success. Further, some questions remained unanswered. How do teenage girls define their own bodies and how, if at all, does that definition influence how they perceive life at school? How does that definition influence the girls' success at school? In what ways are school administrators dealing with the influences of body image on teenage girls in their schools? Because there is little research that unites the literature surrounding success at school and school climate with studies about body image and the culturally thin ideal, the methodology for this study will be tailored to flesh out the connections, if there are any, between students' school successes and their perceptions of their body images.

This chapter will discuss the researcher's paradigm and research methodology for this study. A discussion of participant selection and sampling methods, data collection and analysis as well as the limitations of the study are also included in this chapter.

#### *Problem, Purpose and Research Questions*

This research will address the problem that school administrators do not have information as to how adolescent teenage girls with body image issues function in a high school and whether their functionality is meaningfully different from students who do not have negative body images.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how teenage girls conceptualize their bodies within the context of a large urban public high school in a mid-sized Midwestern city and determine what implications those conceptualizations have on

their learning. Most practically, this study will investigate the ways in which the girls' success at school intersects, if at all, with adolescent females' body image. The data collected from the participants will be used to formulate a theory that describes the relationships between adolescent females' body image, the quest for a culturally thin ideal and participants' school successes within the context of a high school. In addition, this study will make concrete recommendations for high school administrators as to the best tactics for facilitating school success for female students with body image issues.

Therefore, the research questions for this study are:

1. How do adolescent girls' definitions of their bodies relate to their perception of their high school's climate?
2. How does the manner in which adolescent female girls define their bodies relate to their success in school?
3. What is the nature of adolescent girls' and high school administrators' perceptions of how adolescent girls' body image influences administrative practice?

### *Qualitative Methodology*

This study will employ qualitative methodology. According to Hammersly (1992), the main goal of a qualitative study is to document the world from the point of view of those being studied. This is in contrast to a quantitative study, where there is a focus on prediction based on causal relationships (Hammersly, 1992). In addition, as demonstrated in Chapters I and II, there is little research that analyzes how, if at all, body image relates to success at school. As a result, a qualitative approach is appropriate for this study for two basic reasons.

First, according to Creswell (2009), quantitative methods address closed-ended questions, while qualitative approaches tend toward addressing open ended questions. Because there is little research as to the relationship between adolescent female body image and their success in school, closed-ended questions are not effective for this study because it is not yet known whether there is a relationship, the nature of it or its salience in the schools. For this reason, it is more useful to have participants describe their perceptions in their own words.

Secondly, qualitative studies are more conducive to inductive reasoning (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative studies tend to use deductive logic; one tests a theory based on observation and data analysis (Hammersly, 1992). In contrast, qualitative designs are more amenable to inductive logic; observation of data and creation of meaning or a theory from those observations (Hammersly, 1992). The present study begins with no hypotheses; there are no assumptions as to the relationship, if there is one, between body image and school success. The purpose of the research is to investigate whether the relationship exists, and if it does, the nature of it to use the information to make practical recommendations for school administrators to foster success in students who are in pursuit of a culturally thin ideal due to poor body image. Therefore, this study is inductive, rather than deductive and a qualitative approach is appropriate.

In the case of this study, there is no theory to test; rather theory will be generated. The few studies that have analyzed the effects of adolescent female students' weight or weight-based issues on school achievement have utilized quantitative methodologies.

However, this leaves out a bevy of information that may be gained from students who think about their bodies in different ways than the quantitative research can predict. Qualitative design will allow the voices of adolescent females to create an understanding for school administrators about the challenges and/or victories they face in high school in light of the way they feel inside their bodies.

#### *Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural Approach*

This research is centered on students of different body types from different backgrounds telling their stories of how they navigated high school. Though diversity is often thought of in terms of race or culture, body type and perceptions of body image make students diverse as well. Therefore, this research is done from a sociocultural perspective. Miller (1993) argues that because there is growing diversity among children of the United States, it is important that the sociocultural influences on students and their contributions to learning are understood. Culture, according to Miller (1993) is shared beliefs, socialization practices, ways of doing things, social settings (such as schools), values, knowledge, physical settings, and objects (like media artifacts).

Because the research has shown that United States culture creates a culturally thin ideal for which adolescent females often strive, an understanding of their stories within a sociocultural context is appropriate. From a sociocultural educational perspective, as articulated by Vygotsky, learning is a social activity that occurs within a community of elders and peers (Miller, 1993). At the same time, the literature shows that students who are perceived as obese are stigmatized. If both of these statements are true it is crucial to understand the phenomenon within this context.

Zembylas (2007), states that the social constructivist research grounded in the work of Lev Vygotsky and others, emphasizes the idea that learning is both social and emotional. Vygotsky (2004) argues that one sees and interacts with the world in different ways based on his or her emotional state. Further, that emotional state is at a critical state during adolescence (Vygotsky, 2004) According to Vygotsky (2004), teenagers experience contradictions and polarizations of thoughts and feelings at this time, as their brains become more adult-like. These disequilibrium emotions, argues Zembylas (2007), are socially constructed and dependent on culture. Social interactions govern how a student feels and this, in turn, interacts with the socially constructed feelings of school personnel. These socially constructed emotions govern what happens inside of a classroom, and students interpret those happenings with their own socially constructed lenses (Zembylas, 2007). This is an important consideration for the present study, as the focus is on a psychologically sensitive issue that is governed by a culturally created phenomenon.

### *Grounded Theory*

Because one of the goals of this study is to generate a theory, grounded theory methodology will be used (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This methodology is appropriate for use in any philosophical perspective (Charmaz, 2005). Grounded theory's main attribute is that it allows for a way to systematically use inductive reasoning for a study (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), grounded theory is a general qualitative methodology where data is systematically gathered and analyzed.

Grounded theory emphasizes theory development and is interpretive in nature (Strauss &



Corbin, 1990). According to Charmaz (2005), one strength of grounded theory is that it allows the researcher to treat phenomena as lived and understood, rather than how they appear in text. Stern (1995) lays out the appropriate uses for grounded theory. According to her, grounded theory is deductive, rather than inductive, and is appropriately used when theory does not exist. She states that the method is also useful when one is analyzing a new point of view (adolescent girls with body image issues) for a familiar setting (high school) (Stern, 1995).

Grounded theory research is conducted by qualitative interviewing. Theoretical, or purposive, sampling methods are used and systematic coding procedures are necessary to ensure that concept development is emphasized. Goldkuhl and Cronholm (2010) state that grounded theory methodology systemizes the data analysis stage of qualitative research. The coding procedures for grounded theory are open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). Open coding is the first stage of data analysis, where the researcher is “open” to anything (Merriam, 2009). Here, the researcher identifies any segment of the data that may be useful and categorizes it however it seems to fit (Merriam, 2009). These initial categories will likely change, and the object of axial coding is to go back through them and collapse and refine the categories. Axial coding is dependent on reflecting on the coding done in open coding and making more intuitive and broad categories of data (Merriam, 2009). Selective coding, the final coding stage, is where the core categories are finalized and theory is generated (Merriam, 2009).

In grounded theory, each category has properties (Merriam, 2009). Properties are descriptors of the category. For example, perhaps there is a category of “bullying” in the present research. Some of the properties may be “name calling,” “feeling intimidated” or “public humiliation.” According to Merriam (2009), the category is like the hub of a wheel, while the properties are the spokes. The generated hypotheses are that which link the properties and the category (Merriam, 2009).

These stages of coding do not happen all at once. According to Creswell (2009), grounded theory involves multiple stages of data collection. The focus of grounded theory is theory generation using conceptual density (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This means that there is a richness of concept development that comes from systematically checking the data as the process is ongoing. The researcher must immediately analyze the results for their main concepts. Charmaz (2005) states that grounded theory is an inherently comparative method. After each interview, the data is compared with the existing information to generate emerging theory based on the concepts that are present throughout (Merriam, 2009). This allows for the refinement of the interrelationship of the categories of information that are derived as the process moves along (Creswell, 2009). This method, the constant comparative method, allows for the research to group information in a way that enhances the similarities and differences of the data (Creswell, 2009).

According to Goldkuhl and Cronholm (2010), there are several strengths to grounded theory. First, there is a systematic procedure of data analysis, which is outlined above. Creswell (2009) also argues that the systemic nature of grounded theory is one of

its strengths. One of the major criticisms of qualitative methods is that the methods are unscientific and the clear approach outlined in grounded theory is an answer to that criticism. In addition, grounded theory emphasizes the absence of researcher bias in creating the categories to represent a more pure form of research (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). Another strength is that because the theory is generated from the data, it is empirical in nature (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). This process is transparent and allows for the reliability and credibility that qualitative studies are often criticized for lacking.

### *Sampling Method*

Participants for this study are female students who attend Sandra Day O'Connor High School (OHS) in a mid-sized urban district in a mid-sized Midwestern city. Three school administrators from OHS and one outside of it were also interviewed. The administrator outside of the school works at Thurgood Marshall Elementary, which is a K-8 school that feeds into OHS<sup>2</sup>. The school's district serviced 46,697 students during the 2009-2010 school year (Ohio Department of Education, 2010). OHS services students who are in grades 10 through 12 and its enrollment was 1,196 in January 2011<sup>3</sup>. All students within the school are eligible for federal free and reduced lunch, as the poverty rate in the entire district is near 100%. There are 593 African Americans, 355 Caucasians, 191 Hispanics (mainly Puerto Rican), 29 multiracial students, 15 Asian

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<sup>2</sup> Freshman throughout the district are housed in ninth grade academies.

<sup>3</sup> All statistics for OHS were taken from the school's online data system. This system contains the enrollment information of every student in the school. The numbers change frequently, however this information was current as of January, 2011.

Americans and 5 Arab students attending OHS. Of those students 590 are female and 606 are male.

Female students were accessed through junior and senior English classes. They were given the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ) (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995) while the boys in the class did an unrelated activity. Details about the SATAQ are outlined in Table I. The researcher selected junior and

**Table I: SATAQ Details**

<b>SATAQ Subscale</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Purpose of Subscale</b>	<b>Sample Item</b>
Information	0.96	To determine where people get their information about body image	TV programs are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive."
Pressures	0.92	Indicates the level of pressure the person feels to look a certain way	I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to have the perfect body.
Internalization-General	0.96	To determine the degree in which the person subscribes to a culturally thin ideal.	I wish I looked like the models in music videos.
Internalization-athletic	0.95	To determine the level at which one desires to look like an athletic person.	I compare my body to that of those who are athletic.

senior English classes for two reasons. First, all students must take English in order to graduate, so there is a wide range of students. Second, the researcher is a sophomore unit principal and the use of juniors and seniors reduces the risk of a conflict of interest.

The purpose of the SATAQ is to measure the extent to which people internalize cultural prescriptions of body ideal (Thompson et al., 2004). The SATAQ contains 30 statements with responses measured by a Likert Scale. The SATAQ measures both the degree to which participants are aware of a cultural thin ideal and the degree to which they internalize it (Warren et al., 2005). The four subscales of the SATAQ are: information, internalizaion (general), internalization (athletic) and pressures. See Table 1 for details about the SATAQ subscales. Cronbach's alpha is .90 for the entire questionnaire (Warren et al., 1995). The individual alpha levels are specified in Table 1.

36 11th and 12th grade females between the ages of 17 and 20 completed the SATAQ during their English classes. From those students, 10 were selected for participation in the qualitative interview. These students were selected based first on scores on the SATAQ and then for diversity of race. Table III shows the basis for

Students who participated in the SATAQ were first given an identification card where they wrote their names, ages and race. This card had a number, which they were to copy onto the actual SATAQ. Each student's scores and races were entered into Apple Numbers and identifiable for later selection by their identification card numbers.

Each SATAQ item is scored 1-5, with one being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree." Several items are reverse keyed. In these instances, the scores were adjusted (5 became 1, 2 became 4, etc.) A variable was created for each SATAQ subscale (Internalization General, Internalization Athletic, Information and Pressure) and the scores for each question corresponding to that subscale were added together to form the variable. For example, Internalization General was represented by items 3, 4, 7, 8, 11,

12, 15, 16, and 17. The student's scores for all of those questions were added together to form the Internalization General variable.

Once the four variables were created, it was then possible to sort them based on their scores for each subscale. Students were then selected based on their subscale scores, allowing for diversity in the races of the participants. Participants were African American, Caucasian, Hispanic and Asian. Some participants were among the lowest scorers in the subscales, others scored higher than their peers and other participants showed a range of scores. Therefore, this study examined data gathered from students with a range of adherence to a thin ideal.

#### *Data Collection*

Participants who were purposively selected through the SATAQ instrument were interviewed by the researcher in her office at OHS. Interviews were be semistructured. This interview technique mixes structured and less structured interview questions, requires certain data from all participants, includes a list of questions to be explored and allows for flexibility with the questions (Merriam, 2009).

All respondents were asked a core set of questions relating to their experiences in high school, body image, and how they perceive their success could have improved or been worsened with the help or hindrance of school administrators. Follow up questions further explored the respondents' thoughts and added thickness to the concept development. In addition, all respondents answered structured demographic questions regarding race, age, high school characteristics, academic achievement, goals, and socioeconomic background. See Appendix A for the actual interview questions.

### *Data Analysis*

Interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. Transcriptions will be made by the researcher as soon as possible after the interview. The data will be analyzed manually. After the interviews are transcribed into Apple Pages, they were printed out on colored paper. Each respondent was assigned a color of paper his or her interview was printed out on that color in duplicate.

The first step to analyzing the data is to analyze data through open coding. This is a process where the interviews are analyzed one at a time for small categories of data. According to Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), this allows the researcher to find small categories that help initially sift the data. Each interview was open coded immediately upon transcription, rather than waiting until the final interview. Each interview was then compared to the previous ones, as grounded theory calls for a “constant comparative” process, where data is compared against itself as it is collected (Merriam, 2009).

For this study, after the interview was recorded, it was transcribed into Apple Pages and then printed out in duplicate onto the assigned color. One copy of the interview was kept whole for reference. The researcher took the other copy of the interview and open coded it. Each line was analyzed for categories. For instance, when Ms. W said, “They’re sedentary. They’re not productive,” the researcher open coded this statement into “Exercise.”

According to Charmaz (2005), the first stage of coding should focus on defining the action in the interview statement. She also indicates that the categories should be short and to the point, such as “defining her own body,” or “feeling self

conscious.” (Charmaz, 2005). Lines of data found relevant during open coding were labeled with the participants’ pseudonyms and cut out and sorted into first the general categories, then the more refined categories during later stages. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), there are many different strategies a research may use to code data, however the important point is for the strategy to be adjusted should the research call for it.

As themes begin to emerge from the data, the researcher will utilize axial coding. Axial coding is the process by which the categories derived through the process of open coding are grouped together to form larger categories (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2009) states that axial coding, through creation of the larger categories is where the theoretical model begins to take shape. Again, due to the constant comparative nature of grounded theory, this process will occur as new data is obtained from interviews. Thus, the open and axial coding will occur at the same time with different data. In addition, Charmaz (2005) advocates reanalyzing the data as new categories may inform earlier data.

After all of the interviews were conducted, the open coding and the axial coding generated several themes of data (Creswell, 2009). These themes were used to generate a theory and produce recommendations for secondary school administrators. This was done through selective coding, where a theory was built from the interconnection of the categories (Creswell, 2009).

### *Limitations*

This study does have some limitations. First, like most qualitative studies, the sample size is small, therefore the ability to make generalizations from the findings is



limited. However, the purpose of this study is to generate a theory that may be tested using a larger random sample in future research. Another issue this study has that is common to qualitative studies is researcher bias. Because the researcher is the interviewer and interviewing techniques are used, the researcher is the main instrument through which the study is conducted and like all humans, she is flawed and prone to biases.

Other limitations of the study relate to the site of the study. First, the research will be conducted at a large urban school, where there are serious problems that plague the school, such as occasional violence, lack of resources, chronic underachievement and students who are not well cared for at home. Therefore, the data may be different if it was gathered in a more traditional, suburban setting. In addition, this research only surveys the one school, whereas future research may enliven the topic by comparing and contrasting data from several types of schools. Finally, the researcher is an assistant principal at the site of the research. This creates a certain relationship between interviewer and interviewee that may influence answers. This issue was combatted by selecting only students that are under the jurisdiction of other assistant principals.

#### *Researcher's Perspective*

I grew up in an upper middle class neighborhood and went to an upper middle class high school. Therefore, my own high school experiences varied in many ways from the students whom I study. However, I was *in* high school for three years, but I have *worked in* high schools for twelve years; all of them urban, like the one where I currently serve. As a result, I do have a strong background in the issues that my students face.

The topic for this dissertation, like most, arose from the anecdotal. I am a warrior in the “war on weight”. I have always been heavier than I have desired and have taken drastic measures to make myself thinner; all of those who work closely with me can attest to my adherence to P90X, running and other exercise programs. In addition, they know not to offer me sweets. I was a magna cum laude student in high school, but as I reach for my Ph.D. and reflect on the different opportunities that I did and did not have, I feel that much of it hinged on the fact that I was heavier than the other girls. For example, I was never asked to a homecoming, winter formal or prom. By the time I was a senior, I had enough and sought out a date. I remember being bitter because I thought that the skinny girls did not have the same problem. I tried out for the softball team twice and never made it past the first cuts. I was too self conscious to try out for drama and hated getting up and speaking in front of my classes, even though people have always listened to me and I am a very strong public speaker now. I remember one particular instance when an English teacher divided us up into pairs to work on a project and I was paired with a relatively popular boy. I apologized to him and offered to have the teacher find someone else for him to work with. I was sure he was upset to work with someone so fat, but he looked at me like I was out of my mind.

Essentially, I come from a place where the accepted thin ideal is based on television and movies. Girls who cannot fit into a very small cheerleading uniform or simply pick up a single digit size pair of jeans and assume they will fit must either change or face mocking, rejection and inner demons. The ideal body image is about five foot four, has a very flat stomach, and can wear a small sized top and under a size 8 pants.

This is the thin ideal that is the model which will be used to help describe the participants of this study; whether or not they fit into it sheds light on their responses.

As a result of my background, I have always believed that if I were smaller I would have been more successful. I would have immersed myself more in the school, acquired more friends and led a more well adjusted teenage life. I realize that this may be my own dysfunction, but I also understand that I am not that unique; body image does weigh on peoples' minds; especially teenage girls. The lens through which I conduct this research will touch my work, however as Charmaz (2005) states "What we know shapes, but does not necessarily determine, what we 'find.'" (p. 510)

To counteract my biases, I employed Charmaz's (2005) philosophy. I went into all phases of the research with an open mind and treated the data without preconceived influences. Yet, As I interviewed the girls, some of their stories touched me on a personal level. In fact, Kat's story, though I am 16 years older, much shorter and of a different shape, was so much like my own, her pseudonym is a derivative of my own middle name. However, I paid attention to the interviewing phase, as the questions asked could not lead the participants to an answer that I would have given to them. What I wanted the girls to know was irrelevant. I maintained my role as a researcher interviewing participants. Though it was hard at times not to stop the digital recorder and tell the girls what I learned through years of working through my own body image issues, I did no such thing. In addition, all phases of analysis focused exclusively on the data that was before me. The transcribed interviews before me were data and I coded them as such. As in all

qualitative research, I, the researcher, am one of the tools of analysis, however I was careful to eliminate any outside influence.

As such, there are two noteworthy interactions where although my bias did not affect the data, I interacted further with two of the participants. Because I, as a researcher, related so much to Kat's story, and was more than a little concerned that she was paving herself a tough road, I referred her to "Ms. O," the Health Corps liaison, who is also featured in Chapter 5 of this research. I have high hopes that Ms. O's expertise will give Kat some of the guidance that would have saved me years of grief. Secondly, after I stopped recording Naomi's interview, she reflected on an exchange we had about how she would defend her friend against someone who bullied him or her because of his or her weight but not would not defend herself. She indicated that she had changed her mind and she would now defend herself. She then began to cry. She shared that her mother was very overweight and that the struggles she had were unfair. Naomi then asked me what I thought. I shared with her that I thought much like she did when I was her age and probably would score the same or higher on the SATAQ, but had worked through a lot of it. I told her she was very beautiful (as Naomi truly is striking) and she needs to find a way to overcome her feelings. I also told her that her feelings were common amongst her peers. Naomi told me the interview made her think about what we had talked about differently. It should be noted that none of these personal interactions are reflected in the data.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This research addresses the problem that school administrators do not have information as to how adolescent teenage girls with body image issues function in a high school and whether their functionality is meaningfully different from students who do not have negative body images. As demonstrated by the literature review, the culturally thin ideal is the source of agony for many teenage girls. However, there is a dearth of information as to how internalization of a cultural thin ideal manifests itself in school.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how teenage girls conceptualize their bodies within the context of a large urban public high school in a mid-sized Midwestern city and determine what implications those conceptualizations have on their school success. Most practically, this study investigates the ways in which the girls' success at school intersects, if at all, with adolescent females' body image. The data collected from the participants is used to formulate a theory that describes the relationships between adolescent females' body image, the quest for a culturally thin ideal and participants' school successes within the context of a high school. In addition, this

study makes concrete recommendations for high school administrators as to the best tactics for facilitating school success for female students with body image issues.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. How do adolescent girls' definitions of their bodies relate to their perception of their high school's climate?
2. How does the manner in which adolescent female girls define their bodies relate to their success in school?
3. What is the nature of adolescent girls' and high school administrators' perceptions of how adolescent girls' body image influences administrative practice?

Chapter IV will detail the data analysis phase of this research. It will also answer the first two research questions in the form of a theory of female adolescent body image and its manifestations at school. Chapter V will discuss the implications of the final research question. First, the data analysis will be discussed, followed by an overview of the data, a discussion of the theory as a whole and then a conclude with a detailed account of the parts of the theory.

### *Participants*

Four administrators (three from OHS and 1 from a K-8 school near OHS) agreed to be participants and were interviewed for this study. In addition, ten female students were selected as participants based on their scores on the SATAQ. Recall from the methodology section that there are four subscales on the SATAQ: general internalization, athletic internalization, information and pressures. Higher range scores in each of the subscales means that the participant had a higher level of that aspect of adherence to a

culturally thin ideal; for example she internalized the aspect more or felt more pressure.

Table II is a synopsis of the selection of each participant and her SATAQ scores.

**Table II: Student Participants and SATAQ Results**

Student	Race	SATAQ Results
Ari	Caucasian	Highest information score, high in general internalization.
Isa	Hispanic	Median score in general internalization, middle range score in information
Alicia	African American	Middle range score in all categories.
Selma	Hispanic	High range scores in all categories.
Naomi	Caucasian	High range scores in all categories.
Kat	Caucasian	Highest athletic internalization score, high range in all categories
Maly	Asian	Lowest score in general internalization, middle range other categories
Dionne	African American	Middle range in information, all other scores low range.
Tee Tee	African American	High range in information, low range in other categories.
Danielle	Caucasian	Low range score in all categories.

As Table II demonstrates, students representing a variety of score ranges on the SATAQ were included as participants in this research. Kat was chosen because her scores were high in all subscales, while Danielle was chosen because her scores were low in all subscales. In addition, because the literature (Beauboef-Lafontant, 2003; Hesse-Biber et al., 2004) demonstrated that a person's culture is a factor in body image, race was also a factor considered in selection. The four Caucasian, three African American, two Hispanic and one Asian participants are representative of both OHS and the literature on body image and the culturally thin ideal.

In addition to the ten students interviewed, four administrators were also participants. Table III is a synopsis of the administrators' characteristics.

**Table III: Administrative Participant Characteristics**

<b>Administrator</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Position</b>
Mr. J	African American	Principal, Sandra Day O'Connor High School
Ms. W	African American	Unit Principal, Sandra Day O'Connor High School
Mr. K	Caucasian	Unit Principal, Sandra Day O'Connor High School
Mrs. M	Caucasian	Assistant Principal, Thurgood Marshall Elementary

Tables II and III demonstrate who the participants are, and for the student participants, why they were selected. However, more information about them is needed to ground the data in some context. What follows is a short vignette about each.

*Administrative Participants:*

Mr. J is the principal of OHS. He is in his early forties, African American and complains about his height, which is shorter than average. He has worked in the school district for 15 years as an administrator and was a teacher in Texas before that. He prides himself on being very strong for his stature. When he was growing up, his family did not have enough money to feed everyone to their satisfaction and he often fought his brothers for food. He is famous for telling students that despite his short stature he never missed a meal.



Ms. W is one of the unit principals at OHS. She is in her early fifties, an African American and has worked in a high school setting for fifteen years, partially as an English teacher and more recently as an administrator. Before that she was a social worker, handling cases for juveniles in court. She grew up in the area, but only recently moved back from a southern state. Ms. W describes herself as being very small as a child, then “exploding” as a teenager. In high school, though she never wore more than a size 8, and was homecoming queen and a cheerleader, she considered herself to be too heavy.

Mr. K is also a unit principal at OHS. He is in his mid forties and is Caucasian. He has been a high school administrator in the district for nine years, but taught multiple handicapped students for twelve years previously, both in the district of this study and in a rural district. When he was in high school, he was training for the military and exercised vigorously. He states he always pushed himself to the limit athletically and “had no problem with his body.”

Mrs. M is a first year assistant principal at a K-8 school that feeds into OHS. She was an elementary school media specialist until this school year. She is a Caucasian female in her early thirties. Mrs. M stated that she was anorexic in high school. Her boyfriend at the time threatened to break up with her if she gained weight, so she and a friend “decided to be anorexic together.” She says that she was “by no means overweight” but felt pressure to be thin and developed an eating disorder that lasted her junior and senior year of high school.

*Student Participants:*

Ari is an 18 year old senior at OHS. She fits the definition of the culturally thin ideal, though she is shorter than average. Ari is Caucasian and likes OHS because of its diversity. In fact, Ari's father works in the district of this study and brings her to school daily from their home in a city about a half hour away. When she graduates, Ari wants to go to a state university that is located in the city where she lives.

Alicia is a 17 year old repeat junior. Alicia is African American and like Ari, also fits the thin ideal. She hopes to graduate this year, and is taking credit recovery to catch up to her classmates. Alicia gets good grades "sometimes" and likes school except for "the rules." She wants to go to a technical college for certification in the medical field after she graduates.

Isa is senior class president this year at OHS. She is 17 and describes herself as Puerto Rican. Isa loves OHS and is a member of many clubs and sports. She is around the school as much as any student and loves to help out with any school related project. Isa is a little shorter than the ideal and more athletically built. She wants to go to a state university next year but says she has to "start on that."

Naomi is a 19 year old senior at OHS. She is Caucasian and slightly bigger than the thin ideal, and tall, but by no means is she heavy or overly tall. Naomi is taking a year break from school next year to save money to attend community college and then she wants to transfer to art school. Naomi likes school, especially art and drama, and describes herself as "weird."

Tee Tee is an 18 year old senior at OHS and likes school. She is a model of the thin ideal and is happy with her self-image. She is African American, likes OHS because it is not out of control, or “off the hook”, as she says, like her previous school and intends to go to college next year to be a physical therapist. Tee Tee can be heard on the OHS morning announcements every day, played basketball and also stays after school to help some of her teachers.

Selma is Puerto Rican and an 18 year old senior at OHS. She does not like school because she thinks the students are disrespectful and rude. She wants to go to cosmetology school, but will work and save money next year before following her wish to become a beautician. She feels successful at school because she comes every day and completes her work.

Dionne is 18 years old, a senior at OHS and describes herself racially as “black and white.” She fits the culturally thin ideal. She does not like school, never did, but does well academically. She says the social aspect of school is the issue. She wants to go to college next year but is not sure yet what she will study.

Kat is taller than the thin ideal and perhaps slightly larger, but admits that she is “uncomfortable in her own skin.” She is Caucasian and used to like school but no longer does. She was accepted to a state university across the state, but says she will probably go to the local junior college and save money while she does her basic college requirements. She says she in no way feels a connection to OHS.

Maly is smaller than the thin ideal both in height and weight. She was the only participant to define her body in terms of height and weight; she is 5 foot 1 and 103

pounds. She is satisfied with this. Maly is Asian (her family is from Cambodia) and her family, she says is all small, because they follow a strict Cambodian diet. Maly does not like school because the other students are disrespectful. She is going to a local community college next year for a dental hygienist degree and also does nails part time.

Danielle would like to be a doctor. She is a senior at OHS and 18 years old. She likes school because she knows and gets along with “everyone.” She says she will probably attend a state university nearby (the same one as Ari) and likes to help out her teachers when they need it. She is Caucasian and fits the thin ideal.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Administrators were interviewed in their offices, with the exception of Mrs. M, who was interviewed in a quiet room at a district building. Students were interviewed in the researcher’s office after school or during their free periods. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed into Apple Pages by the researcher.

Each participant was assigned a distinct paper color, and two copies of each interview were printed. One copy of each transcript was left whole and referred to as necessary for context for key data. The second copy was used for coding. Grounded theory methodology was used to analyze the data. As outlined in the methodology section of this dissertation, grounded theory is an iterative form of qualitative methodology where a theory is developed as the data is analyzed. Grounded theory is characterized by three phases of coding and constant comparison. The details of open coding, axial coding and selective coding phases follow.

The first phase of coding was open coding. During this phase, the interviews were read line by line and categorized for their content. Each line, sentence, paragraph or response, depending on the statement, were then cut and placed in a labeled folder by category. This way, the data was organized by category (folder) and by participant (color). The following is a list of some examples of categories: body change, depression, bullying, grades, overcoming, distortion, happiness with self, and school lunches.

As the participants were being interviewed, themes began to emerge from the categories. Each interview was compared to the previously completed interviews to see what themes were similar and which ones were different. This constant comparison led to axial coding, where the important themes emerged from the interview data. The themes were: ways that girls define or explain their and others' bodies, manifestations of body image distress, school administrative issues, and factors of variance. Each of the themes had categories that fell underneath them. As the categories were sorted, some became less useful to the study and others were recombined and collapsed. Table IV is a representation of the categories sorted by theme.

Table IV shows the themes (derived during axial coding) and the open coded categories that fit under them. It should be noted that there are categories that emerged from the data that were not included. Some, like "medication" were irrelevant to the study. Only one participant mentioned medication as a source of body image disturbance and the context of the data related more to health concerns than psychological concerns. Other categories, like "mean comments," were collapsed into other categories (mean comments was collapsed into bullying). Additionally, some categories fit two themes.

For instance, girls defined their bodies through weight loss; however weight loss was a manifestation of their body images in some cases.

**Table IV: Open Codes Sorted by Theme (axial codes)**

<b>Ways girls define their or others' bodies</b>	<b>Manifestations of body image</b>	<b>Factors of variance</b>	<b>School Administrative Issues</b>
athletics	arrogance	distortion	attendance
change	behavioral manifestations	culture	bullying
cliques/friends	bullying	change	dress code
clothes	depression	comparing	exercise
comparing	dieting	depression	extra curriculars
esteem	dropping out	esteem	grades
growing	eating in public	mood	gym
height/weight	exercise	stress	health
injury/illness	fear		Health Corps
men	happy with self		Programs
myths	overcoming		lunch
perfect body	stereotypes		ROTC
weight loss	weight loss		teachers

*Selective Coding and Grounded Theory*

After the themes were identified, the researcher analyzed them for meaning. It was here that the theory was developed. According to Creswell (2007), grounded theory is different than other forms of qualitative methodology in that the goal is to create a theory from the data. This is done during selective coding (Creswell, 2007). During selective coding, the researcher looked for the links between the themes. The relationship between the themes was the key to the meaning of the study. First, it was noted that the phenomenon was dynamic; the girls' visions of themselves was not a static entity throughout their days at school. The factors of variance shown in Table IV (distortion, culture, change, comparing, depression, esteem, mood and stress) could change the girls'

body images. For instance, Naomi discussed how she was often happy with her body image until she came across girls she perceived as prettier. The comparison of herself to those girls would change her body image. Somehow those factors of variance could change the girls' self-images at any time.

In order to make sense of the moveable parts that were the themes and categories, the researcher consulted the literature. It was here that she revisited Crosnoe and Muller's (2004) assertion that body image is the "looking glass self." Before the research was completed, this quote was the closest to what the researcher predicted the body images described by the participants would look like however; after the interviews, "looking glass self" seemed incomplete because it was not dynamic.

Selective coding continued as the researcher took the idea of "a looking glass self" and compared it to the themes. It was with this piece that the themes made sense. The researcher determined that body image is indeed "the looking glass self," however that image was more analogous to what one would see in different mirrors as she walked through a funhouse. This will be referred to as the "body illusion."

It was then that the themes fit together as a theory. A girl, who looks a certain way objectively, determines her own body illusion by compiling information about her clothing, what she looks like compared to others and how her body has changed from childhood. However this body illusion can be different depending on the factor that is weighing on the student. Based on these factors, the a girl's body illusion can change, projecting a vision of a different looking person depending on the factor that is weighing on the student. For example, if one is considering her culture, she may see herself as a

thinner version of herself than when she is receiving input from others. As a result of the body illusion that emerges from this process, certain behavioral manifestations may occur (dieting, exercising, becoming depressed, etc.). It is these behavioral manifestations that affect a girl's success at school and warrant administrative attention. These variance factors are what makes a girl's body illusion dynamic, rather than the more static idea of a "looking glass self."

It is helpful to now revisit the idea of a "looking glass" and a "funhouse." One way to look at the theory is that it is a tale of a teenage girl going through a funhouse. She is of a certain weight and height, but this has little to do with what she will see. She has a certain body image in her head, and this is her looking glass self. The girl, with her looking glass self (comprised of social comparison, clothes and change in body size) walks into the funhouse, where there are several distorting mirrors. As she walks past them, she sees different images of herself. She walks past the "culture mirror" and that interacts with her looking glass self to make a certain image come back to her. She walks past the "mood mirror" and gets another image, and so forth. When she comes out of the funhouse, she will act in a way that is influenced what she saw in the funhouse. Trips through the funhouse may not always be the same for each girls each time she visits, and it may be different for each girl who visits. Some girls do not even go in; instead, they view their bodies quite objectively and are quite happy. Others visit the funhouse and walk past mirrors that are very distorting and have profound impact on their behavior. Some girls go in the funhouse and see only mild distortions.



### *Body Image Components*

During the interviews for this study, each student interviewed was asked, “How do you define your body?” Only one student mentioned weight or BMI, though the literature overwhelmingly used this to assess any phenomena related to bodies in high school. Yet, the answers to this question are much more complicated because it is dynamic; body image can change from day to day or even minute to minute. Table V shows how students answered the question, “How do you define your body?” without any probing from the researcher. The answers were variable, from “physically fit” to “gross.” However, after the students were asked probing questions, their views of themselves depending on the context of the questions, demonstrating that body image is a complex and dynamic concept for teenage girls. It is a body illusion. In addition, their behavior changed in certain ways, such as increasing their exercise levels or becoming depressed, depending on this variable body illusion.

As one can see in Table V, the girls had a multitude of initial responses to how they see themselves; however only Maly’s was objective. Few of the body definitions given by the girls corresponded to the objective physical body they had. Kat is a good example of this. She scored very high on all subscales of the SATAQ, leading the researcher to predict that a heavy girl would walk through the door for the interview. Rather, Kat is tall and lean. Her initial response to “How do you define your body?”, as shown in Table V, was “gross,” and then she further went on to

describe herself as “chub.” The researcher found no visual correlation between her body illusion, as she described it, and her appearance.

**Table V: Student Responses to “How do you define your body?”**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>“How do you define your body?”</b>
Ari	“I would like to look better and I used to compare myself.”
Alicia	“I think my body is average. Like I really don’t think much of it.”
Tee Tee	“Physically fit.”
Naomi	I think I’m just normal. I don’t feel like I should be really skinny but I don’t feel like I should be overweight either. But I have my bad days too.”
Isa	“I think I’m average. I kinda got an athletic body but I’m also average.”
Dionne	“Kinda slim. Short.”
Kat	“Gross.”
Maly	“I think I’m the weight where I’m like fit for my body.”
Selma	“Like normal. Nothing special about it.”
Danielle	“It’s not perfect but I like it. I’m satisfied with it.”

Kat was not the only participant to answer in this way. Participants in this study gave a range of responses to the question, “how do you define your body?” (Table V) and only Maly’s response was numeric or objective, citing her weight and height. Some of girls’ initial responses changed after probing, as well. For example, Naomi went on to say that she was normal but did not look like a skinny blonde girl. Even Maly, who did mention weight, changed her answer upon probing and stated, “I just looked like a chubby short girl.”

As Kat’s, Naomi’s and Maly’s answers demonstrate, body image is comprised of several elements. The major components to emerge upon probing the question,

“How do you define your body?” were social comparison, clothes and change. Each are examined in the next sections.

### *Clothes*

The girls interviewed sometimes defined their bodies based on their clothes, others' clothes or where they could and could not shop for clothing. According to Ari, who lost weight over the summer of her eighth grade year, she was teased by other girls because she could not fit into a certain kind of dress. In fact, she said, “If you're overweight, you get the fat clothes store.” Alicia has a friend who is very stressed because she worries her choice in prom dresses will be limited due to her weight. “She just keep stressin' about losing weight for prom.”

Isa, who had lost weight, had no idea how much. Rather she described the change in this way: “I used to wear like a large and like extra-large and now I can go like medium or small depending on the maker.” Isa demonstrates in this statement that her concept of her body is not a physiological number but can be expressed through the clothing size she can wear. This was not unique to the girls who were interviewed. Ms. W, one of the administrators interviewed for this study, stated that she felt “chunky” in high school because she “wore a size 8.”

In these instances, body image not the visual of the body, it is the type of clothes that fit on it. In fact, Ari stated that, “only really skinny girls can wear the best shirts.” This phenomenon is not unique to high school. According to Mrs. M., this begins around fifth grade. She stated that girls that socialize in cliques tend to dress alike, that it helps them define who they are. She said that there are several

cliques of girls who are more concerned about their dress than their academics and that it becomes quite a distraction.

In addition, clothing can be a way to defend against a bad body image. According to Naomi, when one can wear whatever she wants, “it makes you feel comfortable and that’s good.” Kat indicated that she wears hooded sweatshirts to cover up so that people do not notice her body. Clothing can be a way to show off, to hide or to fit in. It can be definitional to the girl and it is a component of their body illusion.

#### *Change in Body Shape*

Ari, Maly, Selma and Isa all were able to change their bodies. For the administrators, Mrs. M tried in high school to change her body and struggled with an eating disorder as a result. Among the teenage participants, each girl said that she used to be heavier but is now happier with herself. Selma said, “I was like chubby.” While the other girls had to change their behavior, she “just grew out of it.” Ari also lost weight. According to her, “I cracked down, but I did it in a positive way. Effectively, I said you know what, yeah, I am overweight. And then I literally went to my summer camp and exercised my heart out.” Isa’s change from a larger clothing size is described above. Before she changed, she just described herself as “bigger.” Now she says, “My calf muscles are kind of big for a female but that’s only like because I was like bigger before.” Isa joined sports in high school and attributes her change in shape to this, though she did not indicate she did so purposely.

Maly was unique in that she was the only participant to define her body by weight. She said, “I think I’m at the weight where I’m like fit for my body. Because I’m short and petite.” Maly was the last girl interviewed and the first to define herself with weight. The researcher asked her why she thought that was. Upon probing, Maly stated:

“Because I’m not like...a couple years back, I was very insecure about myself. I was always thinking about suicide because I was going through a lot of things with my parents and I was on the chunkier side. I got to like 115 but I didn’t look like I was 115 because I looked like a chubby short girl.”

Therefore, even though Maly does use weight to define her body, she also conceptualizes herself in the context of the change she went through. She said she lost weight by eating less fast food, drinking more water, exercising and eating more vegetables.

None of the girls were asked whether they had lost weight or their bodies had changed, however Selma, Ari, Isa and Maly all brought it up as part of their definitions of their bodies. These students, though none of them described a drastic change, were all what they self-perceived as too heavy now self-perceive themselves as the proper weight. Therefore, the prior experiences of the girls in bodies with which they were not happy is part of their current body definition. For them, change is essential to their body images.

### *Social Comparison*

By far, the most common way in which girls talked about their bodies was through comparison to others and comparison to perfection. Each girl was asked if

they believed there was a perfect body out there, and only three of them (Kat, Tee Tee and Isa) admitted they thought so. However, both Tee Tee and Isa stated that perfection was relative; a perfect body is whatever one wants it be, whatever makes that person confident and happy. For Kat, the perfect body is a Victoria’s Secret model.

**Table VI: Participants’ Description of the Perfect Body**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Admitted they believe in a perfect body?</b>	<b>Description of Perfection</b>
Ari	No	Barbie
Alicia	No	N/A
Tee Tee	Yes	Whatever makes you happy.
Naomi	No	“Superskinny;” blonde hair and blue eyes.
Isa	Yes	Whatever makes you happy.
Dionne	No	“Video looking girl;” Big boobs, butt. Small waist.
Kat	Yes	Victoria’s Secret model
Maly	No	N/A
Selma	No	People on TV
Danielle	No	Skinny and curves

Table VI shows the girls’ responses to whether or not there is a perfect body. However, even though only three girls admitted they believed in the perfect body, each girl except Maly and Alicia referred to a perfect body. After the initial question, asking them to describe the perfect body, participants were asked to elaborate. It was at this time, that Ari, Danielle, Dionne and Naomi all described the perfect body, but stated that they themselves do not believe in it; but they think others do. Selma did

not describe a perfect body; however later in the interview she admitted that she wished she “looked like the people on TV.”

Though only Kat and Selma outwardly compare themselves to perfection and use that as part of the definition of their own bodies, the reality that girls can describe a culturally thin ideal and are comparing themselves to it was evident by the participants’ description of their peers. Kat had a high level of adherence to the idea of the culturally thin ideal and actively compares herself to it. “I think the perfect figure is short, she has like a tight body, you know what I’m saying. She’s pretty and everything, and I’m not, I don’t feel like I’m that. I mean I’m tall and I’m chub.” In addition, Naomi added that teenage boys looked for girls who fit the culturally thin idea, “Let’s be honest. Guys out there, they want like a really skinny, beautiful girl. But if I came up to them, like normal and weird, they’d be like oh, OK.”

However, perfection was not the only mode of comparison the girls used. Definition of body image through comparison was evident in several of the interviews. Words like “normal” (Selma), “average” (Isa, Alicia and Danielle), “smaller” (Ari) and “taller” (Kat) show that the girls think about their bodies in relation to those around them. The girls did not construct their body images in a vacuum; they did so by comparing themselves to the people around them. Naomi articulated this when she expressed that she did not like when other girls referred to themselves as fat because, “if you feel that way about yourself, then what do you think I am because I’m much bigger than you and maybe not as great looking.”

The girls were not the only ones who used social comparison as a way to define themselves. Mr. J acted aggressively in his youth because he “felt that others thought he was weak because of his size.” Mrs. W thought that she was “bigger than the other girls” after she grew into a size 8. Mr. K had no problem with himself because “I knew I was in better shape than everyone else.”

### *Factors that Distort Body Image*

Extending further the analogy of the looking glass self (Crosnoe & Muller, 2004), the teenage girl is not looking into a regular bathroom mirror to see her “looking glass self.” Rather, the girl, with the components of body image in her head, is looking through the distorted mirrors at a funhouse. Depending on which way they look, which way they walk and when they stop and look in a mirror, the girls may see a different distortion. In other words, the components of body image may look different depending on certain factors. Those factors are culture, mood, and input from others. These are detailed below.

#### *Mood*

Mood was a major manifestation factor for the girls; feelings were often hurt when remarks were made about their bodies and this will be discussed further with the rest of the manifestations. However, mood as a distortion factor was not a common theme among the girls, but it was a profound one. Naomi explicitly stated that her body image was directly dependent on her mood.

“I think I’m just normal. I feel like I’m where I should be. I don’t feel like I should be really skinny because that’s unhealthy but I don’t think I should be overweight either. So I think I’m like just in between. But I have my bad



days too. I mean like I feel like I could lose a couple of pounds and things like that.”

In the first part of her statement, Naomi expresses a healthy body image. She is happy where she is, and she is realistic about what she should look like. However, she then refers to her “bad days.” On these days, Naomi states that she wants to lose weight. Her body did not change on these days, only her mood.

In response to her statement, Naomi was asked if mood is a factor in defining her body. She affirmed: “Yeah. Like if I’m on my period, after it I feel better and I feel like I lost weight.” Therefore, for Naomi, when she walks through the funhouse and looks through the mood mirror, her body image changes.

Naomi’s experience with mood and her body is supported by literature. Rotenberg, Taylor and Davis (2004) researched this phenomenon by first assessing undergraduate females’ body images using the Body Shape Questionnaire and the Body Image Ideals Questionnaire. This gave the researchers a measurement of the subjects’ feelings about their bodies. Then, the subjects were exposed to either 25 statements that affirmed their images or 25 negative statements. These were used as cognitive mood inducing primers. They found that the subjects exposed to the negative mood primers exhibited worsened body images. This was assessed by two more body image instruments: the Body Image Assessment Test and the Concerns for Shape and Weight Scale.

Similarly, Carter et al. (1996) found that women with bulimia rated themselves as larger after being exposed to negative mood inducing musical cues.

These subjects' body image was assessed using a computer silhouette program. In addition, the researchers demonstrated that the subjects who were exposed to the musical cues identified the thin ideal as smaller than those who were not exposed to the music (Carter et al., 1996).

Therefore, mood is a distorting factor of body image. Naomi's assertion that she feels like she should lose weight on her "bad days" is consistent with the findings of the two studies. A more negative mood can lead to females assessing their body more negatively and assessing the thin ideal as smaller.

### *Social Feedback*

The literature review demonstrated that adolescent female girls were very vulnerable to peer pressure (Kilborn, 1994; Hesse-Biber et al., 2006). The participants of this study confirmed this assertion. For the participants, their body images were influenced by others' pictures of themselves. Selma said, "I was like chubby. And the kids would call me names and stuff and they would see that it hurt me." Ari said that people sometimes define others, "Everyone sees how you look or like how if you are heavy and someone notices you're heavy, then they'll either say it or make fun of you. They'll define who you are." Ari states that before she lost weight, people told her she was heavy and she said that she "cracked down" on it as a reaction.

Naomi recalls a time where she was victimized by a few "skinny girls" at work. She perceived that they were laughing at her and assumed it was because they were calling her fat: "They were like she's fat and they started laughing at me. Like

it's kinda obvious you're talking about me. And it was just an off day and that just made me feel terrible.”

Kat, by far, demonstrated the most body image disturbance of any of the participants. This was also corroborated by her high SATAQ scores. She describes herself as “chub” and “gross.” When asked why, it became clear that someone else defined her body for her:

“Alright, well like growing up, like me and my older brother like we constantly fight. He always, like that's the first thing he would say. So I got that stuck into my head, like I'm not pretty. I'm not, you know what I mean?”

Furthermore, Kat concedes that her body image is not only defined by others but defines the way others react to her, “I'm told that I don't have confidence, that makes people not want to like talk to me.”

Mrs. M had a similar experience when she was in high school: “My boyfriend at the time told me he would break up with me if I gained weight.” She recalled that her friend had a boyfriend that said the same thing. As a result, “we decided to be anorexic together.” She was vulnerable to this outside feedback despite the fact that Mrs. M said in retrospect, “I was by no means overweight.”

Therefore, body image can be changed by others. What they say, how they say it and the vulnerability of the person who hears it may affect how that person feels. Walking through that funhouse, some of the funny shaped mirrors are placed there by other people.

## *Culture*

Research outlined in the literature review demonstrated that culture has an effect on how people feel about their bodies in several ways. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2003), and Hesse-Biber et al. (2004) were among those scholars that indicated that African Americans have a higher tolerance for “thicker” bodies. In addition, other scholars (Popenoe, 2005; Warren, 2005) also argued that culture, including African American and Hispanic, can act as a shielding mechanism against the pressures of the culturally thin ideal.

This held true throughout this study. First, the SATAQ data showed that the highest General Internalization subscale score was a 25 for an African American female, which was a middle range score among all the girls who took the SATAQ. This means that the Caucasian students who took the SATAQ had a higher degree of believing in a culturally thin ideal. Kat’s score was a 43, which is a full 18 points higher than the highest degree of thin ideal internalization for an African American student taking the SATAQ. The three African American girls who participated in this study (Tee Tee, Dionne and Alicia) all expressed being happy with their bodies. They were not purposively selected this way. Alicia was selected because she scored in the middle range in everything, again, no African American girls scored high in the categories, and Dionne was selected because she had a relatively high score in information. Tee Tee was among the lowest in three categories and was selected for contrast.

All of the administrators noticed the cultural differences in body image.

According to Ms. W.:

“Let me tell you something else. There are cultural differences. European Americans are far more concerned with the concept of being thin. I’ve never dated an African American male, every last one of them, that told me, ‘I love a thin woman.’ Sometimes I’d even have to watch my weight because I could just lose weight, it’s a habit. I have to watch that because you can’t get a date if you’re thin and you’re Black.”

Dionne alluded to this concept when she stated that people always, “want something bigger. bigger boobs, bigger butts.” She also alluded to someone “thick” with a “small waist” as the perfect body. According to Mr. K, for the African American students, the biggest issue is “what street you live on,” rather than body image. His assessment shows that body image is not as foundational to the African American students as it is for the Caucasian students.

Ari also picked up on the cultural differences and mentioned it a few times in her interview: “I’ve noticed the Black girls who are overweight, they are all just treated normally. But then the White girls, I don’t see many White girls who are overweight.” Also, Ari stated that, “Usually White girls are more like obsessed about their weight. Definitely White girls. I don’t know why.”

Therefore, culture is yet another distorting mechanism. For Caucasian girls, it may mean a heavier focus on weight, a stronger desire to be thin or a wish to look like someone else. For others, it may be the shield that the literature described (Popenoe, 2005). In the funhouse, one’s culture is yet a different mirror that projects a different image.

### *Behavioral Manifestations*

The participants described a multitude of different behaviors that stemmed from poor body illusion. These manifestations are what happens after looking in that metaphorical series of distorted mirrors.

The administrators noticed a range of behaviors that result from body image. Mr. K. stated that he has seen these girls unable to find dates, turn to drugs or alcohol, disengage from school, or be overly promiscuous. Ms. W. also indicated that girls who feel like they are overweight disengage from school. She states that this is because they feel ignored and that people think they can't do the work.

Mrs. M. indicated that her school is investigating a dip in achievement. In doing so, her and her head principal have been analyzing students as far as their efficacy at school. According to Mrs. M., "We've actually had out teachers regrouping the students of, how to put it, who cares and who doesn't. A lot of the kids in the 'who doesn't' are the ones that are so focused on their body image and what they wear and what they look like." She sees the body image issue affecting student achievement in a significant way.

The student participants described other behaviors. Those are outlined below.

#### *Unhealthy Habits*

Mrs. M. indicated that she was anorexic in high school as a reaction to bad body image. None of the girls in this study showed a proclivity to anorexia, however they did describe behaviors that were unhealthy.

Ari stated that she sees many girls not eat in the lunch room because they are trying to lose weight. In addition, she claims that when she decided to lose weight, “she exercised like crazy,” but did not indicate that she did so as a lifestyle change, just as a quick means to an end. Alicia stated that some of the people who are too skinny, “throw up.”

#### *Allow Victimization*

Bullying of students about their bodies is rampant and will be discussed in depth in Chapter V. However, the data from this current study shows that being made fun of because of weight will only affect someone if they allow it. Isa stated, “If people make fun of me, I’m just gonna be like I’m happy with my weight. Cuz they’re obviously insecure about them. Maybe they’re too skinny. I like the way I am.” Danielle said she would just walk away from someone who made fun of her body, “It’s not worth fighting over.” Tee Tee said, “I wouldn’t really feel offended. It’s my weight, my body.”

The reactions were much different for girls who are more sensitive about their bodies. Naomi’s tale of being made fun of by skinny girls at work affected her deeply. She was proud of herself because she did not cry until after they left. Kat said that if someone made fun of her body, “I’d be real upset. I’d be like really? Like, and my whole day would be ruined.” Selma also shared that when she was heavier and was made fun of, it hurt her feelings.

### *Disengagement from School*

All of the administrators noticed that students become disengaged in school when their body images are not healthy. Mrs. M. shared that when she was in school she did not do as well as she could because she was malnourished. For the girls in this study, there is evidence that disengagement from school is related to body illusion.

Isa, Danielle, Ari, and Tee Tee are all very active at OHS and all have healthy body images. Alicia is active in ROTC but cannot stay after school because of transportation. She also has a healthy body image. Naomi engages with her art teacher, but does not participate in any extra curriculars, Kat does not like school and states that she has no connection to OHS. Selma does not like school and says that she never has.

Alicia noticed that students who are overweight often put their heads down or “get real quiet” in health class because they are embarrassed at some of the topics.

Ari told the following story:

“My friend here. She wants to leave. I told her don’t leave. But kids are making fun of her for her weight...She’s a straight A student, she’s only had one B in her life. And she’s got a lot going for her but she really needs, like she needs self esteem, to higher her self esteem. I feel bad for her because everybody makes fun of her for her weight. And she really wants to drop out because she can’t handle it. The pressure and stress of people making fun of her really does affect her. It does a lot of people.”



Ari's friend may be on the extreme, but the story does show that body image can cause a disengagement from school, no matter how academically successful the student seems.

#### *Girls With Healthy Body Images: Staying Out of the Funhouse*

Body image distortion is by no means universal, even for Caucasian females. It was not universal in this study, either. The tales of some of the girls, especially Naomi and Kat, who had very unhealthy body illusions, showed a stark contrast to others, like Tee Tee and Danielle, who were barely able to acknowledge some girls do not feel good about themselves. However, the data shows that many girls have trouble accepting who they are and what they look like. Whether or not they are the minority right now may change as the number of people with weight problems increases, as predicted.

#### *Body Illusion Theory and Conclusion*

Glaser and Strauss (1967) created the grounded theory approach to qualitative research as a structured way to inductively build theory using interview data. The theory that was generated using grounded methodology in this current study was earlier described as follows:

A girl, who looks a certain way objectively, determines her body illusion by compiling information about her clothing, social comparison and how her body has changed. However this body illusion can be different depending on certain factors: her culture, her mood and input from others. Based on these factors, the body illusion can change, projecting a vision of a different looking person depending on the factor that is weighing on the student. As a result of the body illusion that emerges from this process, certain behavioral manifestations occur (dieting,

exercising, becoming depressed, etc.). It is these behavioral manifestations that affect school success and warrant administrative attention.

This theory helps to explain adolescent females' experience in high school. There is much room for future research guided by Body Illusion Theory. For example, it is important to understand that each girl's "trip to the funhouse" is different; some may be more affected by culture, others by mood. Still others may comprise their body images more by social comparison and less through clothing. In some cases, distortion may be a major factor; other girls may have a more realistic picture of themselves.

Research using Body Illusion Theory as a framework and analyzing the different ways in which students experience this phenomenon can have great benefits. For instance, understanding the girls who experience less distortion may lead to creation of better programs for students with harmful and unrealistic body illusions. Another possibility is creation of a way to target girls who are at risk of a harmful body illusion and the ability to help them avoid the issue altogether. Some girls stay out of the funhouse entirely; they believe they look fine and do not give it another thought; research may help girls like Kat and Naomi, who sometimes live in a painful place because of what they see in the funhouse. Body Illusion Theory is a start, as the present literature was incomplete in describing what Kat and Naomi saw looking back at them in the mirror.

Chapter V will address the implications for school administrators of the theory of body illusion presented here. When girls see themselves in varying and distorted ways, schools must be able to help them be successful and combat the issues they are having. The girls had concrete recommendations for school administrators and they were not too different from what the administrators themselves had to say. Chapter V will discuss four concrete recommendations for school administrators in light of the research discussed in this chapter: reconsideration of strict uniform policies, modernization of the health and physical education curricula, improvement of school lunches and heightened attention to bullying.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to gain knowledge about how teenage girls conceptualize their bodies within the context of a large urban public high school in a mid-sized Midwestern city and determine what implications those conceptualizations have on their learning. The study investigated the relationship between the girls' success at school and the ways in which that success was connected to their body images. As a result, the data led to the creation of the Body Illusion Theory, which is a first step to conceptualizing the relationship between body image and success at school in an environment where a culturally thin ideal reigns supreme. The purpose of this chapter of the dissertation is to not only make concrete recommendations for high school administrators as to the best tactics for facilitating school success for female students with body image issues, but to highlight the implications of the research and give recommendations for future study.

Previous sections of this dissertation addressed the first two research questions targeted by this study:

1. How do adolescent girls' definitions of their bodies relate to their perception of their high school's climate?
2. How does the manner in which adolescent female girls define their bodies relate to their success in school?

36 11th and 12th grade females between the ages of 17 and 20 completed the SATAQ during their English classes. From those students, 10 were selected for participation in the qualitative interview. These students were selected based first on scores on the SATAQ and then for diversity of race. In reference to research question one, the findings indicated that it was not just the girls with very poor body images (Naomi and Kat) who were able to tell tales of bullying and academic disengagement; administrators and students with healthier body images also described body related difficulties in school. Kat was entirely unattached to the school; Naomi was afraid to stand up for herself. Ari had a friend who was contemplating dropping out as a result of weight-based bullying. These data argue that there is a relationship between teenage girls' body image and school climate.

Research question two delved into the practicality of the research by asking whether body definition was related at all to success at school. In reference to research question two, the data showed that there were differences in the degree of attachment to the school and academic achievement for students who were struggling with their body images. Recall, Mrs. M shared that she made a conscious decision in high school to be

anorexic. She pointed to a tangible way this affected her success, stating that she was unable to concentrate in school due to malnourishment. Today, Mrs. M also sees girls as early as the fifth grade putting their outward appearances above their academics.

Tee Tee and Isa showed devotion to OHS and neither were conscious of their bodies. Yet Kat, whose body image woes peppered her remarks, admitted she was in no way connected to OHS. According to Pritchard, Morrow and Marshall (2005), connection such as after school activities and empowering relationships with school faculty are crucial to achievement. Alicia spoke about how overweight students in her health classes would shut down when diet and exercise were discussed and Ms. W said that obese students were, “invisible.” These participants’ words show a relationship between body image and success at school.

However, the focus of Chapter V is the final research question:

What is the nature of adolescent girls’ and high school administrators’ perceptions of how adolescent girls’ body image influences administrative practice?

These data led to several practical administrative policy implications. Both student and administrator participants targeted common areas of need in the area of body image and school success. In addition, participants were able to talk about what they saw happening at OHS in regard to body image and school success right now. There are some positive trends, however there is much room for growth. First, the current practices will be reviewed, followed by a close look at the needs suggested by the data.

### *Current Practices at OHS*

All four administrators interviewed for this research admitted that body image was not at the top of their priorities. Still, the student participants told of teacher support for students they perceived struggling with weight issues and the administrators were able to talk about some trends and interventions that they have noticed. Overall, teachers were depicted as very capable when dealing with students who are perceived as overweight and administrative practice in the area is incomplete.

Alicia shared that she was very interested in the Junior ROTC program at OHS. She stated that she helped out the military instructors after school and enjoyed the required activity, which is more rigorous than physical education. Alicia cited this as a positive for the students who were overweight or bullied for being so at OHS because they get the opportunity to become stronger and they are only graded on effort. She said that everyone in the class, including the military instructors, are very supportive of students who struggle because they are out of shape. This phenomena was also noted by Naomi, who noticed that there is a very heavy girl on the cheerleading squad. “They tell her she can do it, and she participated and that’s good.” According to Bandura (1994), mastery experiences like those described by Naomi and Alicia are crucial for developing confidence.

Teachers, in general, were described by the student participants as very supportive of students who were not self confident or appeared overweight. Danielle noticed that one of her teachers made sure that she got one very overweight student involved regularly, “I think because she wanted her to feel like she fit in.” Ari, Naomi, Dionne,

Alicia and Isa all cited specific teachers who were very supportive about personal issues. There was agreement among these girls that the teachers were helpful for all kinds of problems, even with bodies.

Therefore, there are positive practices happening at OHS right now that support student success in school even when they do not feel successful with their own bodies. For example, the teachers are supportive and students are not differently graded because of physical issues. Still, conversations with the administrators showed that even though they were aware of issues in the area of bodies, body image and success at school, they had little in the way of answers.

Administrators demonstrated they knew of reasons or instances of body image impeding school success, however their actions were incomplete. For example, Mr. K stated that being overweight put students “at risk for other types of behaviors. They experiment with alcohol or become promiscuous. They get into altercations and are late to class because they are out of breath.” When asked what school administrators could do, Mr. K recommended “more physical education classes.” Mrs. M recounted how she and her principal had identified body image a source of inattention to school but she had no ideas as to how to combat it. Ms. W felt that students who are overweight are ignored by their teachers, however she made no mention as to interventions she had put in place.

The most revealing insight about the knowledge of the relationship between body image and school success but failure to have any way of handling the issue came from this story told by Mr. J:



“Manny’s<sup>4</sup> mom called central office because she was angry he was being withdrawn. But he was an 18 year old with 3 credits, straight F’s and a host of behavior problems. I simply told him, ‘You got to go, brah.’ However before I did so, I researched and found out that mom had been contacted by [the researcher] and Ms. W to discuss his progress and possible interventions and alternatives. [the researcher] had to track mom down at her job through the damn switchboard. He was referred to the district psychological services and he was disciplined several times. We did our part. Then she called central and claimed that we called him a drain on our resources and did nothing to help him. Before the meeting with the academic superintendent, we did research into Manny’s school history. He got A’s and B’s until 4th grade. Then he started failing. So it wasn’t us. But when we looked at his school pictures, he started getting fat in 4th grade. He probably couldn’t fit in desks. He probably got the shit kicked out of him. Because they notice that, even the boys. Mom is enabling him. This is her fault.”

Mr. J’s vignette is enlightening on multiple levels. First, it shows that Manny (who is described as morbidly obese by both Mr. J and Ms. W) was treated with dignity. Interventions were attempted but not successful and the parent was contacted and met with several times over. However, Mr. J goes on to speculate that Manny’s problems were because of his weight. He implied, by citing bullying and inability to fit in a desk, that Manny’s sharp decline in elementary school was parallel with his weight gain. The second way in which this tale is interesting is that despite the number of interventions provided by Mr. J and the other administrators (including the researcher), Manny’s weight was never broached as an issue, intervened with or investigated as a problem. Nevertheless, Mr. J cited it as the issue. Therefore, Mr. J acknowledged a direct relationship with body image and school success, however he never addressed it in the interventions.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a pseudonym, though Mr. J used the student’s real name, as the researcher is familiar with the student.

Manny's story shows that though administrators are able to articulate a relationship between body image and school success, they are not yet able to intervene. This shows that administrators *do* have a role in body image and school success. Four areas (Health Corps, uniform policies, school lunches and bullying) in which administrators may make a difference are detailed in the next section.

### *Implications for Administrators*

#### *Integration of Health Corps into Regular Curricula*

Maly, Naomi, Ari, Alicia, Tee Tee, Dionne and Danielle all mentioned Health Corps as a positive influence on students who have issues with their body images. They indicated that this program was something that people find helpful but not nagging or negative to students who are overweight or perceive themselves as such. OHS has a Health Corp representative, Miss O, who works in the school to teach students and staff about health issues in the school and in their lives. Miss O works with classroom teachers to present lessons on special occasions, does special events like soy milk tastings in the lunch room, provides guidance to staff and students about nutritional choices, and offers programs like Zumba and Teen Iron Chef after school. She recruits volunteers and students who are interested in her programs through advertisement on the morning announcements, posters around the school and word of mouth. Miss O has a core group of about ten students who regularly participate, however her programming reaches a wider audience when she does special events in the lunch room. Teachers who are

interested work with Miss O to create team lessons. She is also a regular in the Multiple Handicapped classroom.

Health Corps is a group founded by Dr. Mehmet Oz who was a regular on *Oprah* and moved on to host a television show about health. He is also a cardiothoracic surgeon. Dr. Oz founded Health Corps to help students learn to be healthy, exercise and eat right but also to “empower them to be tough in the modern world.” (Health Corps, 2011) Health Corps’ mission is “Educating the Student Body” and it does so by sending recent college graduates into schools to come into classrooms and teach the group’s curriculum in return for a stipend (Health Corp, 2011). According to Miss O, Health Corps was founded to function, “like a Peace Corps for health in inner city schools.” Miss O said she had to apply for the position and upon acceptance of the position, she committed two years to working toward a healthy OHS.

The major tenets of the Health Corps curriculum are shown in Table VII. As the table shows, the curriculum shows a unique blend of fitness and nutrition with mental resiliency. The mental resiliency piece is missing in current health and physical education classes. The idea that “the body and the mind are integrally connected” is something that this research demonstrated is both true and not understood. For example, Naomi described that she felt skinny when she was in a good mood and horrible when she was in a bad mood. Mr. K stated that his experience with students who need medication show that they did not understand the effects of the medication, which are sometimes weight gain, and the ramifications made them very frustrated, causing them to engage in other unhealthy behavior.

Further, the mental resiliency aspect of Health Corps gets at the heart of some of the major issues for the students. Bullying of students because of their bodies was described vividly by most of the participants. Anger and stress, which are addressed by Health Corps, feed bullying in two ways; they can be at once reasons to bully and reasons to be victimized. Health Corps also teaches students to communicate with each other in positive ways, which is a weapon against bullying.

In addition, Health Corps teaches students to be healthy or even to change into a healthier fitter person, without pressure or judgment. By empowering students minds and teaching them to exercise through creative and alternative ways, the group makes being healthy seem accessible to students who may have thought they did not have the means or the ability to do so.

At OHS, Miss O has done a variety of programs. One was a health fair, where she recruited representatives from a local hospital to do BMI and blood pressure screenings, had stations where student made relaxing bath salts, competed in fitness contests for prizes, sampled things like soy milk and learned about lung cancer. All OHS students had the opportunity to attend during their English classes. The health fair was cited by several participants as a source of a positive lesson on body image. Miss O often sets up stations in the cafeteria for students to earn a healthy treat by writing out what they are thankful for or learning tips for a “Healthy Halloween. Miss O states that Dr. Oz is adamant that Health Corps workers be young and able to relate to students in order to make them see how they can live their lives healthily.

**Table VII: Health Corps Curriculum**

<p><i>Resiliency</i> Students learn: The mind and body are integrally connected To recognize their strengths and self-worth To recognize realistic, healthy body-types To control stress and their reactions to stress To understand that mental health affects physical health To better manage their time To communicate effectively and in a positive way To control anger To understand how sleep is vital to their mood and their health</p> <p><i>Nutrition</i> Students learn to: Eat foods from all five food groups Understand the health benefits and the health detriments of fat Think of portion sizes Eat breakfast to lose weight, gain energy, and do better in school Know that the food they eat affects how they look and feel Learn how to lose or gain weight responsibly Choose healthy foods in restaurants Avoid steroids and dubious supplements Cook from scratch</p> <p><i>Fitness</i> Exercise on a regular basis Stay fit without gym equipment Develop a weekly workout plan Find creative and alternative ways to stay fit Chiropractic/Spinal Hygiene</p> <p>(Health Corps, 2011)</p>
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Ohio is projected to have more of its residents obese than not by 2018 (Ali, 2010) as habits are compromised by fast food, digital age hobbies and increased availability of transportation. It follows that in this world, students will regret decisions they have made

that negatively impact their bodies and need some proactive guidance along the way.

The data from this research demonstrates that Health Corps is making positive headway in this direction. However, its success is hampered by it being an separate entity. It is not automatically embedded in the curriculum. Maly said this makes Health Corps seem like, “only fat people want to go and so no one signs up because they don’t want people talkin’.” Miss O said that participation is disappointing in many of the after school cooking activities, Zumba, yoga and meditation sessions because the students do not have transportation.

Health and Physical Education classes for 21st Century students should employ much of the curriculum that Health Corps proposes. Therefore, Health Corps would become part of the regular curriculum for all students. Administrators on the curricular level should look to groups like Health Corps to guide their direction in the student health arena. Student participants again and again stated that Health Corps was a positive influence and made students feel good about themselves but want to be healthy. However, health class at OHS was described by Alicia as a place where overweight students became quiet and withdrawn because they were uncomfortable during weight discussions. Ms. W simply said of health class the way it is now: “They hate it. Alicia’s point about students feeling uncomfortable in frank discussions about weight would be counterbalanced by the focus on mental resiliency, making small steps and positive reinforcement that is central to Health Corps’ philosophy.

Integrating Health Corps or a curriculum similar to that of Health Corps in physical education, health and even family and consumer science classes would extend

the reach of a program cited by students as successful and make it accessible to students.

Students' progress in this curriculum should be assessed in a value added manner.

Specifically, students progress with respect to making healthy choices would be evaluated throughout the semester as part of the course. In addition, this curriculum could replace practices that are currently either outdated or counterproductive; as Ms. W stated, the hospitality teacher, "could improve her nutritional choices in class." Therefore, integration of Health Corps into regular classes, a close relationship with the Health Corps coordinator (where available), and a reexamining of health and physical education classes with a focus on Health Corps like foundations are concrete steps that administrators may take to improve life for students with negative body image issues in schools.

#### *Revision of the Uniform Policy*

School dress codes are not a new concept. However, stricter uniform policies are gaining popularity among public schools. For the purposes of this research, the term "dress code" will refer to a policy where students must adhere to a loose set of restrictions that bar obscene, educationally distracting, sexually inappropriate or otherwise unsafe apparel. A uniform policy means that a school district has a very strict set of guidelines directing students to wear certain clothing, for instance solid color shirts and khaki pants. During the 2007-2008 school year, one in five public schools enforced some type of uniform policy (Swafford, Jolley & Southward, 2011). These uniform policies are created by public schools for a multitude of reasons including: belief it will

positively impact behavior and achievement, combatting demonstration of gang affiliation, and modesty concerns (Swafford, Jolley & Southward, 2011).

At OHS and throughout the district, there is a uniform policy. Students must wear blue or white oxford or polo style shirts; khaki, blue or black pants, knee length shorts or skirts; solid color sweaters or sweatshirts. No hooded sweatshirts, hats or any other headgear are permitted. Students must tuck in their shirts and wear a belt. This uniform policy was created three years ago by the district and the students are still battling its existence by refusing to comply. These students are dealt with punitively with assignments to in school suspension or out of school suspension.

At OHS, the uniform policy was overwhelmingly cited by students and administrators alike as harmful to teenage girls with body image concerns. Mrs. M stated that even in eighth grade there are female students whose dress code shirts will not button properly over their breasts. In addition, Mrs. M said the pants do not sit right on the girls with “larger rear ends.” Ms. W said the girls want to be able to wear something that “flares out” when they are heavier. Naomi said, “I feel like if you could wear whatever you want, that makes you feel comfortable and that’s good.”

According to Swafford, Jolley and Southward (2011), there is no evidence that a uniform policy versus a dress code has any effect on student behavior. In urban elementary schools, uniform policies can have a positive effect on behavior, however the opposite is true in high schools (Viadero, 2010). This is because high school students often rail against the uniform policy, refuse to follow it and are punished or act out in other ways (Viadero, 2010). Urban high schools with uniform policies had more



instances of behavior infractions than those who did not in a 2004 study (Viadero, 2010). Also, uniform are open for interpretation and difficult to enforce (Gereluk, 2007). In fact, Brunσμα and Rockquemore (2003) argue that studies which argue school uniforms improve achievement and decrease behavioral problems in high schools are not done with multivariate analysis and often are funded by school uniform companies.

Therefore, when one considers the effect of the uniform policy on the girls in the study and balances that against empirical evidence for school uniforms, a savvy school administrator should be wary of any type of uniform policy. School administrators building an environment conducive to students who struggle with acceptance of their own bodies are certainly advised against a dress code that does anything but restrict vulgar and obscene clothing that interrupts the educational environment. Strict uniform policies make students feel conscious of their bodies and, in their minds, demonstrates to others that their bodies do not look the same others' in the same clothing. Issues of modesty, gang affiliation and other potentially distracting fashion issues can be dealt with in a less extreme manner. A more liberal dress code which addresses these issues is a far more productive method than the current strict uniform policy to promote both self esteem and a positive learning environment.

### *School Lunches*

OHS and all of the schools in its district participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Schools that participate in this program get a combination of cash subsidies and food directly from the government and in return they must offer reduced cost or free lunches that adhere to certain nutritional guidelines (USDA, 2011).

According to the US Department of Agriculture, the school lunches can contain no more than 30% fat, provide one third of the daily allowances of Vitamins A and C, protein, calcium and calories (USDA, 2011). At OHS, all students are eligible for and receive free lunches. The government reimburses \$2.72 per lunch for free lunches as long as they adhere to the above guidelines (USDA, 2011). Aside from the nutritional regulations, the districts can compose the menus.

The lunches at OHS were cited as problematic for weight conscious by several participants for three different reasons. Ms. W referred to the cafeteria as “Obese City” because of the choices given to the students. Though the lunches at OHS meet the USDA requirements, and even sometimes come as salads, there are other nutritional pitfalls in the cafeteria. Naomi laments the lack of vegetables as a side. The salads come with fried chicken on the top, rendering them deceptively caloric. In addition, students have the option of buying a la carte items that do not need to meet any federally mandated requirements. This menu includes a variety of potato chips, chicken nuggets, pop tarts, sugary juices, and cookies. There are no healthy options here, except occasional bottles of water and baked chips.

The a la carte menu is a gateway into the other two problems students cited with the lunches. With the \$2.72 allowance, cafeteria lunches can only do so much. First, according to Maly, there’s not enough food there for some people, so they are forced to buy food a la carte. Therefore, even if they started with a salad, they are left little in the way of healthy choices after that. Secondly, according to Kat, the lunches are “gross,” so she just buys a la carte and refuses to eat the free food altogether. She says this is a

common practice and that many students are just eating cookies and fries for lunch. This is verified by Mr. J, who stated that he was misled by the disconnect between attendance numbers and lunches served. According to him, only about 60% of students who are present at OHS enter their free lunch codes and receive a lunch. He stated this endangers the school of losing the NSLP.

As part of a school that encourages students to make healthy choices and be happy with their weights, administrators must work with cafeteria staff to ensure that healthy food is not only offered but appeals to the students. Miss O has attempted some interventions with the cafeteria staff but has been thus far been thwarted by bureaucracy and tradition. She recounted her inability to get a grant for a fully stocked salad bar. She cited the issue that there were not enough cafeteria workers to man it and none that were willing to be trained to do so. In addition, any type of salad bar offered would have to go through a rigorous screening to ensure food safety and government regulation adherence. Of the experience with the salad bar at OHS, Miss O was frustrated by the misstep because “more kids would choose salad if they could make it with their choice of components.”

One way that Miss O has collaborated with administration to get around these factors is work with an elementary school to begin a garden on the grounds. She hopes that the students will learn how to produce their own healthy food cheaply and develop healthy habits at a young age. The food from the garden will be used in the school cafeteria. This is an example of a curricular activity that could be integrated into health or family and consumer science classes.

In a world of high stakes testing, technological achievement gaps and safety hazards, administrators can easily overlook school lunches. However, working through bureaucracy with cafeteria staff, ensuring that kids have healthy choices and learn how to live healthy lives is an aspect of an administrator's job that must not be overlooked. School lunches should be part of the solution to growing waist sizes and body insecurity rather than cited as a problem.

### *Bullying*

According to Dracic (2009), bullying is any type of psychological or physical harm done purposely to someone by his or her peers. Defining bullying is complex, as there is a line between simple teasing and psychological bullying. For the purposes of this study, body-related bullying is where one peer says something with malicious intent to another about his or her body. Sometimes, students make rude comments to each other, but the intent is not to harm. One who is bullying is acting maliciously and manipulating the power dynamic so that the victim feels weaker. Still, not all students who are bullied react the same. Kat states that when someone says something to her about her weight, "her whole day is ruined." In contrast, Maly simply said "it'll probably give them bad karma." For this study, the reaction of the student is not the definition of the bullying, it is the malicious intent.

At OHS, psychological bullying of students because of their bodies is rampant and unaddressed. Table VIII is a sample of what the participants had to say about body related bullying. As one can see, only Danielle and Alicia did not see body related psychological bullying. The rest of the participants had either experienced or knew

someone who experienced body related bullying. The vast majority of this is psychological, however Isa's interview revealed that one's body can be a cause for a physical altercation as well.

**Table VIII: Participant Views on Body Related Bullying**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Sample Thought on Bullying</b>
Mr. K	"If you are overweight you get abused. They call you flat out fat. Slob. Everything."
Mr. J	"Right about 8th grade is where they start teasing kids for being overweight."
Mrs. M	"It's not the little, 'oh, you're chubby,' it's nasty, negative problems for our children."
Ms. W	"There are a lot of fat girl jokes."
Alicia	N/A
Ari	"At the talent show, they were picking at her on stage. They cut her microphone off. And everything because she was overweight."
Danielle	N/A
Tee Tee	"A person who goes here would talk about a person because of his weight. It was because he was on the swim team."
Dionne	"They say, 'oh that person's fat' or 'ew look at how big she is.'"
Naomi	"I was at work and I was just sitting there and these girls who were a lot skinner than me were like, 'she's fat,' and they started laughing at me."
Isa	"I remember she got teased about [her weight], and people were going to fight her."
Selma	"I was like chubby. So like people would call me names and stuff and they would see that it hurt me."
Maly	"He's really big. And everyone makes fun of him. They call him fatty and you know."
Kat	"One of my friends was was like talking about my weight to my face and I was like wow."

Bullying is an administrative issue that claims much attention in the 21st century. As stated in the literature review, parents of students who committed suicide are suing an Ohio district because they claim administration did nothing to stop the abuse of their

children (Associated Press, 2010). According to Graham (2010), instances of bullying in schools are on the rise. This is not just a physical and mental concern, but an academic one. Children who are bullied at school demonstrate lower achievement (Beran, Hughes & Lupart, 2008). On March 9, 2011, President Barack Obama recorded a video denouncing bullying and posted it on Facebook (Associated Press, 2011).

The national and state attention that bullying is getting has not escaped OHS. The district that houses OHS began an initiative to address the “human” aspects of their learning environment after a school shooting occurred within the district less than five years ago. District officials now believe strongly in the psychological aspects of the learning environment. This movement started in the elementary schools where PATHS (Promotion of Alternative Thinking Strategies) teaches students to think before they react violently or cause harm to others. On the secondary level, this “human” movement is still in its infancy.

The data from this research indicates that the district should consider adding a facet to the human movement that will include some guidance about bodies. Most of the students were able to recount instances where students who appeared overweight were purposely insulted by their peers. According to Dracic (2009), this continual victimization of a group of people can make them perceive that they are weaker than those bullying, both on an individual and group level. Individual victims of bullying often feel depressed, rejected by their peers and do not show resiliency to the abuse (Graham, 2010).

Administrators should consider the bullying literature when building an environment that will allow girls with body images to flourish. Research shows that decreasing bullying in schools must be done on two levels: first, no reported instances of bullying should go unaddressed by teachers or administrators, and second, schools must take a proactive approach to the behaviors. This proactive approach must include a change in students' and faculty's mindsets to enforce the idea that weightism is not acceptable. Therefore, the proper anti-bullying program should have an element of professional development for teachers to educate them about bodies as an element of diversity. It was shown that weightism is tolerated by society because it is considered controllable (Kim & Willis, 2007). It is this attitude that contributes to the commonality of weight-based bullying. The human aspect of the district's push to meet psychological needs of its students is a step in the right direction, however it needs to address body image issues if it is to reach all students effectively. In the literature review, weightism and stigmatization of the obese was detailed on a societal level. Tolerance of people no matter their shape must be taught so that those who do not fit the culturally thin ideal are not psychologically victimized by their peers.

Mr. J's tale of the removal of Manny from OHS highlights the real world importance of addressing the bullying of overweight students. As Mr. J, plainly stated, "He probably got the shit kicked out of him." Ari also shared that she had a friend who was considering dropping out due to weight concerns. Physical and psychological bullying of students because of their bodies has real implications on their well being and

longevity in schools. Therefore, school administrators must add an aspect to existing anti bullying measures that is sensitive to negative body image and obesity.

### *Significance of this Research*

This chapter has answered the final research question, “What is the nature of adolescent girls’ and high school administrators’ perceptions of how adolescent girls’ body image influences administrative practice?” It is this question that gives the practical and real world applications of the findings of this dissertation. In summation, it was found that there are some positives in school with regard to body image and success at school: students at OHS are not penalized for physical shortcomings, teachers are adept at helping students with hard personal crises including body image distress, administrators are aware of the complications of negative body image have on success at school, and programs like Health Corps are making a real difference. However, there are areas to grow. Administrators are aware of the negative relationship between a poor body image and school success, however they are ill equipped to intervene. Body-related bullying is all too common and not addressed by administrators. School lunches and health and physical education curricula need to be updated to account for the needs of a population that is increasing in weight. Finally, school uniform policies must be evaluated for their use in light of their overwhelming citation as a problem for girls struggling with their body images.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

However, of equal significance is the enlightening of areas of need for future research. Body Illusion Thoery is only in its infancy. First, it targets teenage girls. Mr.



J's experience with Manny and Maly's account of a male swim team member being bullied for his weight shows that body image and success at school are issues that male students struggle with as well. This research targeted female adolescents because the literature, as cited in the literature review, demonstrated that they were the most vulnerable to weight based pressures and weight based teasing. This was true in the data collected for this dissertation, as Mr. J and Maly were the *only two* participants to bring up males, even though the interview questions were gender neutral. There is still a need for research in to adolescent males and body image.

A second area where Body Illusion Theory has room for growth is in its directionality. Right now, the metaphor of a girl traveling through a funhouse implies that she enters, looks in the distorted mirrors and leaves. However, the action is much more complex than a two dimensional path; the distortions may overlap, she may have a moment of clarity (see herself in a regular mirror) or have a body illusion with greater or lower frequency. Right now, this theory is limited in that the various elements have not been analyzed for these variations. However future research will refine the complex mechanisms of Body Illusion Theory.

Third, the research for this dissertation was concentrated on high schools and what happens within. However, much of the thinking that results in a body illusion happens outside of the school. The literature and the data demonstrated that school is a foundational place for the development of a body illusion, however some of this happens in the home. Future research needs to include the effects on family and other influential outside factors on the development of a body illusion. The possibilities of the differing

influences of family on a student's body image or illusion are wide. Within this study, Kat stated her brother was seminal in giving her a bad body illusion, while Maly's family's strict dedication to a Cambodian diet made a large body unacceptable. There needs to be more research into the role of family and family situation (SES, geography, education, etc.) on body illusion.

Finally, as mentioned in the data analysis section of this work, the Body Illusion theory is centered on students with body image problems; whether they be based on reality or distortions. However, there needs to be research into the girls that have no significant negative body images, or the girls who "stay out of the funhouse." Comparison of experiences at school between girls inside and outside of that proverbial funhouse can lead to targeted interventions, proactive strategies and a greater understanding of the connection between body image and success at school as a whole.

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## **APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 1

How does adolescent girls' definitions of their bodies influence their perception of school climate?

- How do you define your body?
- How might others define your body?
- Is there a perfect body?...yes Describe the perfect body. no Tell me more about that.
- (If they describe a perfect body) Tell me about the difference (if there is one) between your body and the perfect body. (If they say no perfect body) How do you feel about your body?
- How do your peers at school define their bodies?
- How does body definition in school influence how people respond to you?
- Describe a specific incident where your body had an effect on the way someone treated you at school. (Probe for an instance of body having a positive effect if response warrants.)

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 2

How does the manner in which adolescent female girls define their bodies influence their school success?

- What makes you feel successful at school? (Probe to find out how they operationalize that; how do you know you are successful?)
- What, if anything, happens at school that makes someone feel conscious about h/her weight?
- In what ways do you feel connected to the school? Tell me about connections you have with any teachers, if any.
- Describe your reaction if someone were to say something to you about your weight. Describe your reaction if someone were to say something to one of your friends about h/her weight.
- What do you do in conjunction with the school aside from your required academics?

#### RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What is the nature of adolescent girls' and high school administrators' differences in their perceptions of how body image influences administrative best practice?

*Administrators:*

- Describe your body image during high school.

- Among the health problems that you see in the school, please talk about how you conceptualize obesity within this framework.
- What programs and or policies do you find move students toward frustration and/or success due to their weight or size?
- How do you categorize body image issues (if at all), as far as their effect on learning?
- Based on your observations, how are overweight students treated by their peers?
- How do you see teachers treating students who are overweight?
- In navigating the bureaucracy of funding and time crunches of creating programs in education, what vision do you have of the creation programs for healthy body images in high school?

*Students:*

- What programs do you feel move you toward success or frustration due to your weight or size?
- What policies do you feel move you toward success or frustration due to your weight or size? (Probe about dress code, dressing for gym.)
- How do you see teachers treating students who are overweight?
- What would you change about current school practices in light of your feelings about your body?

## Appendix B

### SOCIOCULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS APPEARANCE SCALE - 3 (SATAQ-3)

The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire 3 is a revision of our first two scales (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999). It has subscales that assess internalization (general, athlete), pressures, and information. Reliability and validity information are contained in Thompson et al., 2004. See also Calogero et al, 2004 for data with an eating disordered sample. Both of these articles are downloadable from this website (see recent publications in *VITA*). This scale is provided free of cost to those who wish to use it for non-commercial (i.e., you make no money) purposes.

Internalization-General: Items: 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 27

Internalization-Athlete: Items: 19, 20, 23, 24, 30

Pressures: Items: 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26

Information: Items: 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, 28, 29

Reverse-keyed items: 3, 6, 9, 12, 13, 19, 27, 28

Please read each of the following items carefully and indicate the number that best reflects your agreement with the statement.

**Definitely Disagree = 1**

**Mostly Disagree = 2**

**Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 3**

**Mostly Agree = 4**

**Definitely Agree = 5**

1. TV programs are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." \_\_\_\_\_

2. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to lose weight. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I do not care if my body looks like the body of people who are on TV. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I compare my body to the bodies of people who are on TV. \_\_\_\_\_
5. TV commercials are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." \_\_\_\_\_
6. I do not feel pressure from TV or magazines to look pretty. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I would like my body to look like the models who appear in magazines. \_\_\_\_\_
8. I compare my appearance to the appearance of TV and movie stars. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Music videos on TV are not an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." \_\_\_\_\_
10. I've felt pressure from TV and magazines to be thin. \_\_\_\_\_
11. I would like my body to look like the people who are in movies. \_\_\_\_\_
12. I do not compare my body to the bodies of people who appear in magazines. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Magazine articles are not an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." \_\_\_\_\_
14. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to have a perfect body. \_\_\_\_\_
15. I wish I looked like the models in music videos. \_\_\_\_\_
16. I compare my appearance to the appearance of people in magazines. \_\_\_\_\_



17. Magazine advertisements are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." \_\_\_\_\_
18. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to diet. \_\_\_\_\_
19. I do not wish to look as athletic as the people in magazines. \_\_\_\_\_
20. I compare my body to that of people in "good shape." \_\_\_\_\_
21. Pictures in magazines are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." \_\_\_\_\_
22. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to exercise. \_\_\_\_\_
23. I wish I looked as athletic as sports stars. \_\_\_\_\_
24. I compare my body to that of people who are athletic. \_\_\_\_\_
25. Movies are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." \_\_\_\_\_
26. I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to change my appearance. \_\_\_\_\_
27. I do not try to look like the people on TV. \_\_\_\_\_
28. Movie stars are not an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." \_\_\_\_\_
29. Famous people are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." \_\_\_\_\_
30. I try to look like sports athletes.

## APPENDIX C

### INFORMED ASSENT FORM

February 23, 2011

Dear Student Participant:

As you probably know, I am an assistant principal at XXX High School. I am also a doctoral student at Cleveland State University. I will be conducting research at Marshall as part of the requirements for my degree.

My research interest involves students' perceptions of themselves, especially their body images, and how that perception interacts with their school experiences, especially their success at school. The particular study I am conducting is a series of open ended questions that target this research interest.

By participating in this research, you risk mild emotional discomfort in discussing personal feelings. Participation will mean an interview that lasts approximately a half hour. There is only one interview. Risks will be minimized by strict confidentiality. In other words, no one will know that you participated or what you said except for myself, as the researcher. By participating in the research, you can be a part of a project that attempts to make schools a better place for all types of students. Should discussion during the interview upset you, we can make sure that you have an opportunity to discuss your feelings with someone who is trained to make sure that you are in a positive emotional state of mind.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If at any time during the interview you are uncomfortable and want to stop, you can just ask. There is no penalty and you will not be negatively viewed for making that decision. If you wish to participate in this research, please sign and date below.

Sincerely,

Erin K. Murphy  
(216) XXX-4959  
[erin.k.murphy@XXX.net](mailto:erin.k.murphy@XXX.net)

"By signing below I agree to participate. I can decide to stop the interview at any time. I understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject I can contact the CSU Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630."

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

January, 2011

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am an assistant principal at XXX High School and a doctoral student at Cleveland State University. I will be conducting research at Marshall as part of the requirements for my degree.

My research interest involves students' perceptions of themselves, especially their body images, and how that perception interacts with their school experiences, especially their all around success. The particular study I am conducting is a series of open ended questions that target this research interest.

By participating in this research, students risk mild emotional discomfort in discussing personal feelings. Should this occur, they will be given the opportunity to meet with their guidance counselor. Participation will mean an interview that lasts approximately a half hour. Risks will be minimized by strict confidentiality. By participating in the research, students can be a part of a project that attempts to make schools a better place for all types of students and adds to the intervention toolboxes of school professionals.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and students may decide to not complete the interview if they are uncomfortable. Feel free contact me to review the interview questions to ensure that your student is not being put in harm's way. Officials at XXX School District have reviewed the study in depth and determined that the work will be beneficial to the district and that the risks of student participation are not serious.

Sincerely,

Erin K. Murphy  
(216) XXX-4959

"By signing below I agree to allow my child to participate. I understand that if I have any questions about my child's rights as a research subject I can contact the CSU Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630."

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

January 14, 2011

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am an assistant principal at XXX and a doctoral student at Cleveland State University. I will be conducting research at Marshall as part of the requirements for my degree.

My research interest involves students’ perceptions of themselves, especially their body images, and how that perception interacts with their school experiences, especially their all around success. In conjunction with this, I am conducting a survey that will allow me to see how students feel about their appearances and from where they get those feelings.

By participating in this research, students risk mild emotional discomfort in discussing personal feelings. The risks are minimal, and students can choose not to complete the survey. In addition, risks will be minimized by strict confidentiality. The survey will take 10-15 minutes to complete and will be done in English class. By participating in the research, students can be a part of a project that attempts to make schools a better place for all types of students and adds to the intervention toolboxes of school professionals.

The survey is called the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearances Questionnaire. It is easily accessible online by typing “SATAQ” into a search engine. Officials at XXX School District have reviewed the study in depth and determined that the work will be beneficial to the district and that the risks of student participation are not serious.

Sincerely,

Erin K. Murphy  
(216) XXX-4959

“By signing below I agree to allow my child to participate. I understand that if I have any questions about my child’s rights as a research subject I can contact the CSU Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630.”

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*\*By returning this form and participating in the survey students will have a chance to win an iPod Shuffle. If he or she chooses to discontinue participation in the survey due to discomfort, he or she will still be eligible to win.*