

Body and dieting concerns of pre-adolescent South African girl children

by

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Abstract

The topic of body image has become widely researched in the past thirty years, but pre-adolescents have been neglected in this area of research. This dissertation explores the body and dieting concerns of pre-adolescent girls in South Africa in order to address this paucity. A qualitative study was conducted, with data collected via a vignette technique and a semi-structured interview which were analysed thematically. A contradiction was noted between what girls expressed to be true in terms of the importance of appearance and how they perceive those that do not adhere to cultural norms of appearance. Weight and appearance were described as unimportant when evaluating a person, but negative attributes were given to the heavier girl in the vignette, opposed to none to the thinner girl. Appearance-control beliefs also emerged as a salient theme, with participants believing that the heavier girl in the vignette could not help that she was overweight. The latter was interpreted as pity, and masked as empathy, as participants suggested ways in which she could lose weight, and it was expressed that she would be a happier person if she did lose weight. Dieting was a well-known concept among participants, with some stating that they had previously engaged in dieting behaviours.

Key Words: Body image, body dissatisfaction, dieting, pre-adolescent.

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Declaration

I declare that the work presented here is my own, and where reference is made to other research work, the author(s) have been cited.

Signed: E.N. Smit

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Chapter 1: Considerations

1.1 Introduction

Potgieter (1997, p. 1) argues that it is necessary to present the rationale and genesis for research systematically, as our stories are socially constructed and the manner in which they are presented is “determined by the audience which is being addressed”. Following Potgieter (1997), the genesis and rationale for this dissertation is presented as the ‘pre-academic’ rationale and the ‘academic rationale’.

Furthermore, Webb (1992) argues that in order to provide reflexive, engaging accounts of the reasons for the research and the manner in which it is conducted, it is important that the researcher situate herself in the process. By using the first-person throughout the dissertation, I aim to convey the notion of engagement, as opposed to detachment, with regard to the research procedure, the literature, and the participants.

1.2 Pre-academic rationale

Moore and Rapmund (2002) described people as ‘interpretive beings’ that interpret our surroundings and experiences through narratives which function as tools to understand, provide order and give meaning to experiences (Moore & Rapmund, 2002). This research was influenced by a variety of events in my life, which influenced the overall decision to research this topic for my dissertation. Though the events are presented in a systematic way; they are not necessarily sequential, however.

The topic of dieting, body-concerns, and eating disorders has always fascinated me.

The academic and personal interest in the topic has made me especially attentive to women’s comments and behaviours with regard to their body image, including my own. I have always been slender in relation to my height and have never had a reason to engage in dieting. However, constantly comparing my appearance to those of friends and celebrities and the unrealistic ideal that society has construed has become a normative process of thought for me and other women (Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004). I experienced the pressure to be thin when I was approximately 12 years old, while studying ballet. The teacher advocated a very slender physique and encouraged dieting practices. The class were told that they would do better pirouettes if they lost some weight. I still feel the pressure to be thin, although I no longer do ballet. The message is relayed through other sources now. I feel guilty if I did not manage to exercise throughout the

week. I compare myself to the slender women in magazines, advertisements, and on television, and I notice similar behaviour in female friends and family.

One specific event that triggered my decision to research pre-adolescent body image for my dissertation was when my six year old cousin stood in front of the mirror and told me that she thinks her 'love handles and hips' are too big. What I saw was an imitation of her mother, who herself is constantly dieting or altering her appearance but when my cousin later sheepishly asked the waiter at a restaurant to change her drink order to a 'light' version of the original order, I realised my cousin was under pressure to lose weight. This motivated me to read more about body dissatisfaction and dieting among pre-adolescent girls, which naturally progressed into the academic phase of this dissertation.

1.3 Academic rationale

As I started reading on the topic of pre-adolescent girls' body dissatisfaction and dieting, I noticed paucity in studies including pre-adolescent girls as participants. Research, both locally and internationally, has focused mainly on the body and dieting issues of females in adolescence and adulthood, with few studying pre-adolescent children. The published articles found on pre-adolescent girls were contributions made from a quantitative paradigm, which provided valuable information on the relationships and links between body image and the various factors that influence it. These studies investigated body and dieting concerns by making use of biographical data and attitudinal tests relating to the body and eating patterns of pre-adolescents to infer causalities and relationships and to create behavioural models. I was more interested in the reasons for these findings, and looked for research that engaged with the participants in order to provide more in-depth explanations of body dissatisfaction. This proved to be a difficult task, as qualitative research on pre-adolescents' body image was also scarce, both locally and internationally. The lack of studies actively engaging with pre-adolescents to provide a rich, in-depth account of their body image led me to do a qualitative study.

I extended my literature search locally and found that little academic research existed for adolescent, adult, and pre-adolescent samples on the topic of body image. A keyword search on various academic literature databases revealed that, prior to 1994, the majority of body image literature in South Africa focused on body image pathologies, i.e. eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder. These studies also focused mainly on adolescent and student samples. The studies that did involve pre-adolescents and children were mainly quantitative studies, while unpublished dissertations supplied some qualitative insights. During the past decade, (2000 to 2010) the South African Journal of Psychology has not published any articles about pre-

adolescents' body concerns, with only three articles somewhat related to the topic of body image. These articles were titled as follows: "Adolescent South African ballet dancers" (Montanari & Zietkiewicz, 2000), "Evaluation of body shape, eating disorder and weight management related parameters in black females students of rural and urban origins" (Senekal, Nelia, Mashego, & Nel, 2001) and "Women suffering through their bodies: general" (Fernandes, Papaikonomou & Nieuwoudt, 2006).

Studies investigating body image (mainly using adult and adolescent samples) as the experience of embodiment, increased post 1994 with the majority of literature emerging in the past ten years. This could perhaps be attributed to the increasing literature emerging on the subject internationally in the 1990s. However, with the increase in body image literature, information on pre-adolescent body image remains scarce, compared to North-America and Europe. In a recent unpublished thesis exploring body image among pre-adolescents, the author remarks that: "There is limited research on this topic in South Africa, and it tends to be focused on Black women's body image and racial differences" (Maimon, 2009, p.13). One explanation for research being foregrounded on race is that South Africa is historically, and continues to be, a racialised society. At present, the available local research is conflicting in terms of the 'perceived differences' that exist between the races. These conclusions are tainted by the vast social economic divides in South Africa, as very few studies control for this variable and consequently the conclusions call for further investigation.

Furthermore, local research investigating body satisfaction and eating disorders among South African women and children rely heavily on international studies to provide norms and comparative data, as information on the prevalence of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction is rare and possibly out-dated (Wassenaar, Le Grange, Winship & Lachenicht, 2000). The paucity in research has led many to believe that body dissatisfaction and the extreme manifestation thereof, eating disorders, are mainly confined to the Western world, as most studies are conducted in North-America and Western Europe (Wassenaar, le Grange, Winship & Lachenicht, 2000).

This research aims to make a contribution to academic literature by addressing this paucity and adding rich in-depth descriptions to existing quantitative findings. This in turn can inform future research and possibly allow for pro-active strategies, such as programmes encouraging a healthy lifestyle that discourages unhealthy dieting practices for children and assist in providing information for psychologists, educators and parents.

1.4 Objectives and aims of the research

This study aimed to explore the body and dieting concerns of pre-adolescent South African girl children. More specifically, the research aimed to explore the body concerns of pre-adolescent girls, with specific focus on how they view their own and others' bodies, in order to explore their experiences of and reasons for body satisfaction or body dissatisfaction. Dieting awareness and behaviour was also explored.

1.5 Clarifying terms

The next chapter is a discussion of the available literature on the subject. To provide clarity, commonly used terms and phrases in the literature are defined and described to ensure that the reader has a clear understanding of what these concepts entail.

- **Pre-adolescent:** the term will refer to children between the ages of 9 and 12 years (Meyer & Van Ede, 2001).
- **Dieting behaviour:** this term refers to eating practices that intentionally restrict food intake. This may also include behaviours such as purging and excessive exercise with the intent to lose weight (Kostanski & Gullone, 1999).
- **Body Concerns:** this will be the broad term used to explore concerns relating to the body specifically, this will include overall body image, aspired body ideal, and level of current body satisfaction and dissatisfaction. These aspects can be viewed separately as follows:
- **Body image satisfaction/dissatisfaction:** refers to the complex interaction between internal-biological, psychological and external social factors all relating to the eventual mental representation of the body (Blyth et al., 1985; Hutchinson, 1982; Petersen et al., 1984).
- **Aspired Body Ideal (also 'body ideal'):** this refers to the ideal shape the individual wants for herself, this may be similar to, larger than, or thinner than their current body size.

1.6 Chapter outline

The chapter outline of the dissertation is as follows: chapter two is a comprehensive literature and theoretical review juxtaposing the different aspects and factors influencing body dissatisfaction and dieting. Chapter three describes the methodology followed throughout the study, describing how the data was collected, organised, and analysed. Chapter four is a discussion of the themes that emerged from the research, and finally, chapter five presents the conclusions of the research as well as the limitations of the research and opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is a critical and comprehensive review of the relevant literature in psychology, sociology, and disciplines such as public health, available on the body image and dieting concerns of pre-adolescent girls. For the purpose of clarity, the chapter is divided into three sections. The chapter starts with a brief history of body image scholarship and an overview of the various perspectives of body image (section 2.1). Section 2.3, Empirical Findings, discusses the idealisation of slenderness (the ‘thin ideal’). In 2.3.1, the factors contributing to body dissatisfaction are discussed in further detail. Finally, the third section, 2.3.2, discusses dieting as a consequence of body dissatisfaction.

2.2 History and theoretical perspectives of body image

The history of scientific body image inquiry has its roots in clinical psychology and psychiatry, as researchers were interested in psychopathology, specifically distorted body perceptions due to brain injuries (Grogan, 2008). In the 1920s, Paul Schilder considered the wider psychological, environmental, and sociological factors contributing to the perceptions and experiences of body image in his research (Cash, 2002; Grogan, 2008). His work was crucial to exploring individuals’ body image outside of a psychopathological paradigm. He was one of the first scholars to publish work exclusively related to the topic of body image (Cash, 2002). Schilder’s approach to body image continued into the 1950s (Cash 2002, Grogan, 2008). Subsequently, Seymour Fisher devoted his academic career to the study of body image in ‘normal’ subjects, paving the way for contemporary body image research (Cash, 2002; Grogan, 2008). Fisher’s research was conducted in the psychodynamic paradigm, and largely used projective and observational research techniques. According to Cash (2002), Fisher’s work was underappreciated, possibly due to the importance placed on cognitive-behavioural approaches in psychology, in light of the decline of psychodynamic approaches in psychology overall. He published work until the late 1980s, but during his time of academic scholarship, various socio-cultural changes occurred that shaped contemporary body image research.

In the 1960’s, the “thin ideal” became a prominent goal for women who mostly desired a thinner body ideal compared to their current size (Grogan, 2008). The women’s liberation movement during this time (including women’s need for equal rights) is said to have altered the ideal body image and this was reflected in the idealised body, which was slim and almost boyish (Sandford & Donovan, 1984). This ideal continued into the current age, where slim and boyish is still purported

by dominating fashion houses, while a similar but larger-breasted figure is also purported in popular media, making it particularly difficult for women to attain either of these figures (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006). Subsequent increases in plastic surgery, dieting, and attempts to alter appearance in order to attain this ideal encouraged researchers to determine the motivating factors driving these behaviours (Grogan, 2008). According to Cash (2002), research interests into body image and consequent body dissatisfaction escalated in the past 30 years. The majority of literature emerging in the 1990s, as critical contributions, was made toward the scholarship, assessment, and measurement of body image disorders (Cash, 2002).

An international academic journal, *The Journal of Body Image*, first published in 2004, was dedicated to body image, and other considerable advances have since been made in the development of psychological models of body image and the development of quantitative scales to measure body satisfaction and dissatisfaction in various other disciplines, as reflected in this journal (Grogan, 2008). The theoretical perspectives on body image are wide-ranging, and have broadened into other disciplinary contexts. In *The Handbook of Body Image* edited by Cash (2002), various authors contributed to providing a summary of the theoretical perspectives for body image. The outline presented in this book will be used as the guiding framework in which the theoretical perspectives are presented. It should be stressed that this is a very brief description of these perspectives, and is by no means exhaustive. I chose the perspectives most relevant to my topic and the current body image literature viewed as most relevant. Finding primary sources that describe and test these various perspectives in detail proved challenging, as most are dealt with very briefly in handbooks or a select few empirical articles. The perspectives most relevant to the discipline of psychology are presented first.

2.3 Psychology and body image

2.3.1 Psychodynamic perspective on body image

Freud described the ego as the central location for all the different body organs' sensations, while the ego itself also relies on the development of the sensory systems such as vision (Ward & Zarate, 2000). Freud's ego is commonly referred to as 'a body ego' or body self (Krueger, 2002; Ward & Zarate, 2000). The psychodynamic perspective on body image is located in psychodynamic theory, which argues that body image is an "evolving mental representation of the body self", the latter being an accumulation of body sensations and functioning through three specific developmental stages during childhood (Krueger, 2002, p. 30). Krueger (2002, p. 31), argues that the psychodynamic approach recognises the developmental occurrences that eventually lead to body image being "the cumulative set of images, fantasies, and meanings about

the body and its parts and functions; it is an integral component of self-image and the basis of self-representation". Krueger (2002) further explains that developmental disruptions during childhood, especially those that take place between the mother and child, may cause an individual to have an erratic body image, resulting in negative experiences with regard to the body or psychopathology. The psychodynamic perspective on body image focuses strongly on the developmental disruptions and their related consequences and the manner in which this is treated therapeutically.

Although the psychodynamic perspective is one synonymous with psychology, the theory holds little support in contemporary body image studies and in psychology in general (Cash, 2002). The psychodynamic perspective has a strong focus on childhood development but the focus is largely on the developmental disruptions or problems that occur during childhood. Cognitive-behavioural perspectives have dominated scientific inquiry into body-image and currently provide better empirically-verified explanations for body image.

2.3.2 Cognitive-behavioural perspective on body image

Thomas Cash (2002) proposed an integrative view on body image as current empirical research is mainly derived from cognitive and behavioural psychological paradigms. This led him to propose that body image should be interpreted from a cognitive-behavioural perspective. The cognitive-behavioural model, similar to the socio-cultural model, does not imply that one unified theory exists to explain body image; rather it draws from various empirical evidence to make sense of body image and the resultant behaviours (Cash, 2002; Grogan, 2008). At the most basic level of cognitive-behavioural models are factors that influenced how people have come to eventually behave and think, commonly referred to as historical or past events. Factors that occur in the present interact with the historical factors, to influence how a person will react to certain events (Cash, 2002; Bandura, 1986). Cash (2002, p. 38), proposes that historical events during childhood, such as socialisation from the family, peers, culture and the person's physical attributes are factors and experiences that influence how people eventually come to view their bodies. In terms of current events, Cash (2002) argues that they can trigger the cognitive structures formed in the person's past, which can manifest in cognitive and behavioural actions such as internal dialogues about one's body, or self-regulatory behaviour which may include dieting or behaviours that alter one's appearance, such as plastic surgery.

Cash (2002) illustrated this model by means of a diagram that serves as a structure to interpret the various factors that influence body image, however he argues that the model is by no means linear or directional as the causality of body image is complex. The majority of literature read for this dissertation focus in one way or another on the cognitive or behavioural aspects of body image

and the related constructs. As this model relies heavily on the empirical data that researchers provide, it is very suited to providing a framework to understand, explain and predict body image in adults and children.

2.3.3 Neuro-psychology and body image

The neuro-psychological perspective on body image mainly focuses on body awareness and the location of body image, as a neural module in a specific part of the brain (Kinsbourne, 2002). Patients with brain pathology mainly inform the knowledge base for neuro-psychological perspectives on body image, and the absence or presence of body awareness is utilised in understanding body image and its location within the brain (Kinsbourne, 2002). Kinsbourne (2002, p. 25), argues that phantom limb syndrome provides some grounds for a 'brain-based' theory of body image, as patients who have lost limbs often still feel and experience the limb, years after it has been amputated. In a keyword search for phantom limb experiences in childhood, very few recent articles were rendered. A paper published in by Simmel (1966), however, systematically investigated phantom limb experiences among children who had limbs amputated before their 10th birthday. Many of the children experienced phantom limb pain, suggesting that a total body schema is present early in life (Simmel, 1966). Neuro-psychological perspectives on body image focus largely on the physiological and neurological construction of body awareness and body image and is less concerned with the social meanings attached to these constructs, the latter being the focus of this dissertation.

The following two perspectives have been incorporated into psychological research, although they did not necessarily emerge from the school of psychology. The socio-cultural perspective on body image draws from sociology while the feminist perspective on body image includes work from feminist psychology scholars as well as feminist scholars in other disciplines.

2.3.4 Socio-cultural perspectives on body image

The socio-cultural approach to body image includes a number of theoretical approaches that all depart from the premise that one must understand cultural values in order to understand how individuals perceive themselves and others in relation to body image (Jackson, 2002). Jackson explains that a culture that values thinness will likely be characterised by individuals who value this attribute in themselves and in other members of their community. The thin ideal for women, which is the purported body ideal of most western cultures, is the standard by which women judge themselves and others (Grogan, 2008; Jackson, 2002; Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004). The pursuit of this cultural ideal has negative consequences, such as body dissatisfaction, disordered

eating, and the negative evaluation of those who do not conform to the cultural ideal (Grogan, 2008; Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004). Jackson (2002) outlines theories such as the social expectancy theory (or self-fulfilling prophecy theory), implicit personality theory, and status generalisation theory as three of the main theories that fit within the socio-cultural perspective umbrella. These theories address the manner in which people use certain knowledge structures, acquired through cultural values and socialisation, to understand their own life worlds and the behaviours of other people (Jackson, 2002). In essence, all three of these theories predict that people who do not adhere to the social norms will be negatively evaluated by others, and will also behave less favourably toward them when compared to individuals who do conform to the social standards. The socio-cultural perspective succeeds in explaining how cultural messages from a variety of sources influence the manner in which individuals strive for cultural ideals and ostracise those who do not conform (Jackson, 2002). The perspective does not account for the importance placed on the cultural values and to what extent all individuals internalise these values, or rebel against the values, or the extent to which certain individuals are resilient to the cultural norms. With regard to the topic at hand, socio-cultural perspectives are often used to introduce empirical research on body image in children. The majority of published articles on the topic of this dissertation have introductions related to socio-cultural influences such as idealisation of the thin ideal and who (parent, peers, media) is purporting it. Very few formally incorporate psychological theories or the broader psychological perspectives, although the research problems are driven by socio-cultural observations.

2.3.5 Feminist perspectives on body image

Feminist scholars in various disciplines, across different subject matters, have in the past commented on the manner in which women's bodies serve as objects to be viewed (Brayton, 1997; McKinley, 2000; Orbach, 1993). Objectification theory proponents such as Frederickson and Roberts (1997) and McKinley and Hyde (1996) who work within a social constructionist paradigm, support the notion that women's bodies are both socially constructed and objectified. According to McKinley (2002), the feminist approach to body image has influenced the psychological research into women's and girls' body image, as attention has been given to the social construction of body image and the objectification of the body. McKinley (2002) extended an objectification theory to provide a measure to research women's body image as a socially constructed object that is viewed by others.

Building on McKinley's work, Lindberg et al. (2007, p. 724), defined Objectified Body Consciousness as "an overall state of mind marked by the internalisation of others' perspectives and the view that one's body is an object to be looked at and evaluated." This occurs specifically

when a woman's body is objectified over a period of time and she eventually internalises the 'viewer's perspective' (Lindberg et al., 2007). The three main tenets of objectified body consciousness theory are self-surveillance, body shame, and appearance control beliefs (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Self-surveillance is the first behavioural manifestation of objectified body consciousness and occurs when a person views her own body in the way an outsider would (Lindberg, Hyde & McKinley, 2006). This is characterised by obsessive thoughts about the individual's appearance and constant self-checking to see whether she lives up to the unrealistic beauty ideal (Lindberg et al., 2007; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Body shame is the affective result of objectified body consciousness and is experienced when a person feels shame as a result of her body not agreeing with the cultural standard (Lindberg et al., 2007; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Appearance control beliefs relate to the extent that a person believes she can control, and if necessary alter, her appearance by engaging in dieting or other weight or appearance control measures (Lindberg et al., 2007). Women and girls who exert very high levels of objectified body consciousness will internalise the unrealistic cultural ideal of beauty, and will regularly engage in body monitoring thoughts and behaviours resulting in negative experiences when their appearance does not meet the cultural standard (McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Lindberg, Grabe & Hyde, 2007). The majority of research concerning objectified body consciousness has been conducted with undergraduate students, where it was found that women were more likely to exert higher levels of objectified body consciousness than men (Lindberg et al., 2006; McKinley, 1996). A dearth of research exists on specifically the development of objectified body consciousness among pre-adolescents. The "OBC-Youth Scale" was developed, but the research found the measure problematic as the items did not prove to be consistent in measuring the various aspects of objectified body consciousness (Lindberg et al., 2006). Objectified body consciousness is strongly correlated with body satisfaction, and empirical research suggests that children as young as 5 years old experience body dissatisfaction, making them susceptible to possible objectified body consciousness (Grogan, 2008; Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004; Kostanski & Gullone, 1999; Pine, 2001).

Objectified body consciousness has had an important impact on psychological research, and researchers of body image predict that this measure and approach to body image will become more prominent as it develops (Grogan, 2008).

The following section engages the empirical findings related to the psychological perspectives discussed, as well as empirical data available from other disciplines that address the subject. The section incorporates both local and international research. Research that was conducted in South Africa will be specifically stated.

2.4 Empirical Findings

This section presents the empirical findings from various academic sources in a systematic way. I introduce this section with the ‘pursuit of the thin ideal’, which is a prominent theme in body image literature, followed by the factors that were found to contribute to body dissatisfaction, as concluded by body image scholars, followed by dieting behaviour as a consequence of body dissatisfaction.

2.4.1 The thin ideal

The ‘thin ideal’ has become a common term in body image and body dissatisfaction literature and mainly refers to females’ inclination to desire a thinner body ideal as compared to their current body size (Grogan, 2008). The pursuit of thinness for women is promoted and hailed by parents, peers, mass media, teachers, and significant others, such as potential partners, mainly because the thin ideal is equated with beauty and attractiveness (Flannery-Schroeder & Chrisler, 1996; Grogan, 2008; Grogan & Wainwright, 1996). Evidence suggests that this notion has become a societal value or a ‘normative state of discontent’ for women as they are continuously bombarded with societal pressures in order to look a certain way (Grogan, 2008; Flannery-Schroeder & Chrisler, 1996; Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004; Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985).

Research confirms that socio-cultural pressures to be thin, resulting from a variety of sources, negatively affect body image satisfaction for both men and women, however, the prevalence among women is much greater (Cash, 1990; Pine, 2001; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Stice, Maxfield & Wells, 2003). Being thin is associated with positive traits such as happiness, accomplishment, and even will power, while being overweight is linked to being out of control and lazy (Grogan, 2008). Earlier research such as Harris, Harris and Bochner (1982) found at the time that these associations differ for males and females, where obesity in females is more negatively received than in males who are also obese. Harris et al. (1982), found that obese women were more likely to be stereotyped in a negative manner than males of a similar size, whilst Burdick and Tess (1983) found that positive attributes are given to men, irrespective of their physical appearance, while the same does not hold for women of different sizes. Similar studies have confirmed this notion (Grogan, 2008; Grogan & Richards, 2002; Tiggemann & Rothblum, 1988).

The pursuit of thinness is prevalent among women of all ages, to the extent that body dissatisfaction has become a state of normative discontent (Grogan, 2008; Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004; Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985). In a study comparing body dissatisfaction for boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 10 years old, Kostanski, Fisher, and

Gullone (2004) found that girls who were underweight experienced the least body dissatisfaction compared to normal and overweight girls who reported greater levels of body dissatisfaction. Normative discontent is an indication of how the pursuit of the thin ideal has been engrained into the female psyche by societal pressures that overvalue appearance (Grogan, 2008; Levine, Smolak & Hayden, 1994; Paxton, Schutz, Wertheim, & Muir, 1999).

A range of societal messages and pressures promote the idealisation of slenderness. These pressures are also experienced differently, often directly through media images or criticism from a parent or peer, or indirectly by being exposed to someone who is obsessed with their weight and food intake (Stice, Maxfield & Wells, 2003). An example of direct pressure is underweight models who are objectified and idolised in the media. Previous studies found that exposure to these types of figures in the media can lead to negative body image development and overall negative effect in young females (Anderson et al., 2001; Harrison, 2000; Cash, Cash & Butters, 1983; Irving, 1990; Stice, Maxfield & Wells, 2003). Indirect messages, such as peer pressure, were found to be even more effective in creating body dissatisfaction, as many women compare themselves with their peers more frequently than they compare themselves with celebrities (Stice, Maxfield & Wells, 2003). This type of behaviour is not restricted to adult women, but is also prevalent among girls as young as 8 years (Williamson & Delin, 2001), and researchers suggest that girls in younger age groups are also at risk (Pine, 2001) In a study with 5, 7, 9 and 11-year old girls and boys, Pine (2001) found that girls as young as 5 years old perceived the ideal body shape for women to be significantly thinner than the shape chosen by boys. The same study was repeated with male figures, and no difference between boys' and girls' choice for the ideal male figure was found. Collins (1991, p. 200) conducted a pictorial experiment showing children's' figures to 6 and 7-years olds, and from this it was concluded that "...girls learn long before puberty that beauty is a basic dimension of the feminine role". These studies indicate that before girls reach puberty, a bias towards being thin is in place (Pine, 2001).

Research has concluded that thinner persons are more liked, perceived to be more intellectual, more social, more attractive, and even kinder compared to obese persons, who are often perceived as less intellectual, less social and less healthy (Grogan, 2008; Grogan & Richards, 2002; Hill & Silver, 1995; Tiggemann & Rothblum, 1988; Wardie, Volz & Golding, 1995). These findings support the underlying importance of the idealisation of slenderness by most females. The thin ideal, opposed to the healthy ideal, is what is promoted, and in most instances the ideal is a figure that is significantly thinner than the woman's current body shape (Grogan, 2008; Silberstein, Streigel-Moore, Timko & Rodin, 1998). This makes this 'ideal' often unattainable or unrealistic, resulting in a persistent message that one is not thin enough, thus leading to eventual body dissatisfaction (Grogan, 2008; Stice, Maxfield & Wells, 2003; Striegel-Moore et al., 1986). Jade

(1999), stated that weight, especially for women, has become a measure of self-worth, a means of comparing oneself to others in order to rate attractiveness. The pursuit of the thin ideal often results in body image dissatisfaction for many women and girls.

Body dissatisfaction has shown to be the most reliable predictor for the eventual onset of eating disturbances and dieting (Fairburn, Cooper & Cooper, 1989; Kostanski & Gullone, 2007; Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000b). High levels of body dissatisfaction are strongly correlated to dieting, excess exercising, depression, low self-esteem, and eventual restrictive and unhealthy patterns of eating (Hill & Pallin, 1997; Kostanski & Gullone, 2007; Sinton & Birch, 2005). Extreme body dissatisfaction was believed to only occur once a female reaches puberty, however, as indicated, current literature suggests that body dissatisfaction occurs in earlier stages of development, especially amongst girls between the ages of 8 and 9 years, with some studies indicating that girls as young as 5 years old are already at risk (Kostanski, Fisher, Gullone, 2004; Kostanski & Gullone, 1999; Pine, 2001). Tiggemann and Wilson-Barret (1998) stated that the normative body dissatisfaction experienced by females is present for all females, irrespective of their age.

2.4.2 Factors influencing body dissatisfaction

This section engages the various factors that contribute to body dissatisfaction. For purposes of this dissertation I have presented the information in paragraph sections, but in the lived experience of individuals they do not operate in this linear, systematic fashion.

2.4.2.1 Peer Relationships and Interactions

Peer teasing, peer comparison, and peer interactions are three areas that specifically contribute to a negative body image (Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000b; Ricciardeli & McCabe, 2001). Peers have been shown to significantly influence body image concerns among both boys and girls (Gardener et al., 1997; Ricciardeli & McCabe, 2001; Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000b) and in a self-reporting study by Taylor et al. (1998), it was concluded that the importance that peers attach to weight and body concerns account for approximately one third of the variance of self-reported weight and body concerns of girls. Discussing weight, body shape, and dieting among peers has also been shown to contribute significantly to body image concerns, especially among girls (Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000b). Oliver and Thelen (1996) also found that discussions with peers contributed significantly to the perceived body ideal and the overall drive to be thin. Girls who compare and discuss their bodies with those of their peers are likely to show higher levels of body dissatisfaction, and often this comparison is driven by the desire to be thin - as it is believed that this figure is more desirable by peers (Oliver & Thelen, 1996, Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001). In

keeping with the social comparison hypothesis, comparing oneself to peers who are perceived to be more attractive heightens the risk of dissatisfaction with regard to body image (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Thompson, 1992). Very little data exists for social comparison amongst children. Van der Wal and Thelen (2000a) concluded, however, that social comparison amongst children is linked to a drive for thinness and overall appearance dissatisfaction, which in turn is associated with body image concerns.

Negative peer interaction, such as peer teasing, was also shown to contribute to a negative body image (Cattarin & Thompson, 1994; Kostanski & Gullone, 2007). Kostanski and Gullone (2007) found that being teased about one's physical appearance during childhood can have a significant impact on body satisfaction later in life. In most instances, the physical appearance of the child is the subject of teasing, and this is especially prevalent during childhood and adolescence (Kostanski & Gullone, 2007; Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000a; Rieves & Cash, 1996). Warm (1997) identified three different categories of teasing: a) 'hurtful' teasing: mostly acts of physical aggression (e.g. pushing or pinching); b) 'mean' teasing: teasing by means of words (e.g. name calling); and c) "symbolic teasing": teasing by means of "abstract thought processes, gestures and derision" (Kostanski & Gullone, 2007, p. 308; Warm, 1997). 'Mean' teasing is most likely to be found in the pre-adolescent years (Warm, 1997). This method of teasing is likely to be comments directed against the physical appearance of a person (especially facial and weight characteristics), and is often initiated by friends, or in some instances parents (Kostanski & Gullone, 2007; Warm, 1997). Children (both boys and girls) also engage in self-teasing, and in talking negatively about themselves, as they generally believe that if they were thinner, other children would like them more (Oliver & Thelen, 1996).

Thompson, Fabian, Moulton, Dunn and Altabe, (1991), concluded that teasing is experienced as particularly negative when it is directed at body shape and weight. Children who are outside of the 'normal' parameters for weight and height were more likely to be teased by other children (Kostanski & Gullone, 2007). Often, negative stereotypes are attached to children who are obese or overweight, and they are considered, for example, less intelligent, less popular, and even more likely, to be liars (Feldman, Feldman & Goodman, 1988; Grogan, 2008; Kostanski & Gullone, 2007). Children who are underweight are perhaps less stereotyped, but are still subject to teasing (Kostanski & Gullone, 2007).

Among younger girls it was found that the internalisation and experienced impact of teasing, which is related to the child's resilience, and not so much to the frequency of teasing, contributed to body image dissatisfaction (Taylor et al., 1998). This is an area that requires further research to determine exactly how teasing is experienced and what the directional nature of teasing is and its

effect on body image dissatisfaction (Kostanski & Gullone, 2007, Taylor et al., 1998). Teasing is important because of the negative feelings experienced by the child at a particular point in time but also because it is said to have long term effects on eating behaviours and body satisfaction (Taylor et al. 1998, Kostanski & Gullone, 2007). Women who experience high levels of body image dissatisfaction and dysfunctional eating patterns also show high levels of recall pertaining to teasing during the developmental years (Cash, 1995; Kostanski & Gullone, 2007).

2.4.2.2 Family Influence on Body Image

Developmental perspectives suggest that children receive information regarding their bodies (how it looks and how it should look) mainly from their parents, and to a lesser extent from their siblings (Schur, Sanders & Steiner, 2000; Cahill, 1989; Davis 1992). Parents are the most important significant others during the socialisation process, as they shape a child's behaviour and attitudes by transmitting their own ideals and attitudes to their children (Corder-Bolz, 1980; Ogle & Damhorst, 2003; Smolak, Levine & Schermer; 1999). Furthermore, parents contribute significantly to children's construction of their physical selves as they communicate information to children about their bodies (Fulkerson, McGuire, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, French & Perry, 2002; Ogle & Damhorst, 2003). This information also allows children to deduce how they should achieve or maintain their body ideal (Ogle & Damhurst, 2003). The parents' concern with the perceived weight and appearance of the child has a more significant effect on girl children than on boys (Shapiro et al., 1997; Thelen & Cormier, 1995). Girls are also more likely to be viewed as fat by their parents, compared to boys (Striegel-Moore & Kearney-Cook, 1994). It has also been found that mothers are more likely to comment on their daughter's appearance and weight compared to comments related to their son's physical appearance (Ogle & Damhorst, 2003). Boys' desire to be thinner is not necessarily related to parents' encouragement to lose weight, but due to boys being less likely to be encouraged to diet and rather being focused on developing athleticism or a larger muscular body (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001, Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore, 1985).

Bandura (1977, 1986) theorised that a child's behaviour is largely a product of what they experience directly or what is modelled to them by significant others and as a result a parent modelling body dissatisfaction or dieting behaviour may influence the child to do so also. Furthermore, it has also been found that children tend to learn and retain their eating patterns from their parents indicating that the parents' approach to food is very likely to be the approach the child will adopt (Hill, Weaver & Blundell, 1990). A study by Smolak, Levine and Schermer (1999), found that the level of body esteem experienced by girls in particular was influenced by the mother's own weight concerns, complaints, and dieting attempts, as well as the father's verbal expression of weight concerns. Some studies found conflicting results when it comes to the direct influence of

parents on the children's body esteem and body dissatisfaction. Most studies found some link between these two variables, however, especially in the case of the mother-daughter relationship (Ogle & Damhorst, 2003, Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000a). An example is a study done by Levine, Smolak and Hayden (1994) that concluded that the mother's perception and directed approval of their daughters' body did not account for the majority of variance in body dissatisfaction. However, Thelen & Cormier (1995) found that the parent's encouragement to diet was significantly linked with body image dissatisfaction.

Within the family, the gender of the parent becomes increasingly important as it has been found that when it comes to messages regarding the body and eating habits, mothers and fathers differ (Spitzack, 1990). Mothers are more criticising and more concerned with children's appearances than fathers are (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Spitzack, 1990; Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000b). It is often daughters who are affected by the mother's concern with appearance (Ogle & Damhorst, 2003). The relationship between the mother and the daughter has been examined extensively, resulting in evidence suggesting that a definite relationship exists between the body image of mothers and the body image of their daughters (Ogle & Damhorst, 2003; Usmiani & Daniluk, 1996). Mothers in particular are the main focus with regard to familial influencers, as they themselves are pressured to be thin, whilst less evidence exists for a significant relationship between daughters with eating disorders and the body image or modelling behaviour of the father (Kichler & Crowther, 2001). Chernin (1989, p. 37) states that "the problem with female identity that most troubles us, and that is most disguised by our preoccupation with eating and body size and clothes, has a great deal to do with being a daughter, and knowing that one's life as a woman must inevitably reflect upon the life of one's mother." Mothers with body dissatisfaction and low body esteem tend to communicate a similar message to their daughters, which is often internalised or modelled by the daughter (Ogle & Damhorst, 2003). Striegel-Moore, Silberstein and Rodin (1986), observed that mothers often model behaviour which focuses on their weight concerns, their own perceived shape, and attempts to act on these dissatisfactions by engaging in dieting behaviour. These behaviours are often internalised and imitated by young girls (Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000b). It is also possible that mothers are put under pressure by fathers to raise girls that conform to societal norms of beauty, while they themselves may also be under similar pressure. This is an area of research that deserves further investigation.

Sinton and Birch (2005), included the relationships between parents as familial influence that could possibly contribute to a child's body image. The study by Sinton & Birch (2005) concluded that low levels of marital love between parents were associated with a higher likelihood by the child to engage in dieting practices as early as age 5. It is important to view the family context along with the interpersonal and personal contexts, as these factors interplay with one another, resulting in a

child possibly experiencing body image dissatisfaction and high levels of depression within a potential problematic family environment (Sinton & Birch, 2005). Studies researching body image in children with same sex parents or with a gay mother or father are scarce, especially in South Africa. This is one aspect that is not taken into account in mainstream literature concerning the family and body image and poses an opportunity for future research.

2.4.3 Self-esteem, Resilience and Body Image

In a review of body image studies, Ricciardelli and McCabe (2001) pointed out that children experiencing body image dissatisfaction generally experience feelings of low self-worth and are usually negative about other aspects of their lives. However, conflicting results have emerged in other studies where no causal links between self-esteem and body esteem were found, suggesting that these constructs are closely linked to one another, and are possibly interchangeable (Basow, 1992). Similarly, it was found that negative affect, low self-esteem, and depression are closely associated with body image dissatisfaction and the emergence of dieting and unhealthy eating behaviour (Stice, 2002; Sinton & Birch, 2005). However, the causal links between these factors have been inconsistent. Body Mass Index (BMI) and current weight status have been linked with levels of depression, self-esteem, and the eventual onset of dieting, but the independent effect of each of these constructs cannot be conclusively explained (Sinton & Birch, 2005). Wood, Becker and Thompson (1996) found gender and age to be two factors that influence the level of body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem. The relationship between these two constructs was shown to be significant for girls and only became pronounced for 10 year old girls, while 8 and 9 year old girls showed no causal link between the two constructs (Wood, Becker & Thompson, 1996).

A factor to consider is the level of sensitivity to criticism or the child's overall resilience to criticism and teasing. This implies that messages from peers, mass media or parents may be internalised in a more ambiguous way by children who are more sensitive to criticism, when compared to children who show a greater resilience to criticism (Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000a). Social anxiety and body image dissatisfaction were shown to be associated with one another, especially amongst women (Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000a) and is a valid construct in predicting body image dissatisfaction among children (La Greca, Dandes, Wick, Shaw & Stone, 1988 as cited in Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000a).

2.4.4 Context, Race, Gender and Socio-economic Status

Increases in eating disorders and abnormal eating practices were observed in Black populations all over the world, including South Africa, in the past decade (Caradas et al., 2000, Grogan, 2008;

Mciza et al., 2005; Mumford, Whitehouse, & Platts, 1991; Mukai, 1996). The majority of international research studies observed that African-American adult females generally select a larger body ideal in a figure preference task and exhibit lower levels of body dissatisfaction compared to White females (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001). Thompson et al. (1997) found a similar result with a pre-adolescent sample of 817 children (boys and girls). African-American children selected significantly heavier figures for their ideal figure in figure preference task; but no mention is made of social class. Research conducted in South Africa found that body image varies between women, especially when taking into account factors such as urbanisation, social status, and cultural norms (Mciza et al., 2005). A larger body size may indicate health (especially the absence of HIV), wealth, and fertility (Mvo, Dick & Steyn; 1999), but these perceptions differed for women in urban and rural areas, where the former are more likely to engage in dieting practices and show higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Senekal, Steyn, Mashego & Nel, 2001). Discrepancies exist between urban and rural dwellers in terms of social class, and these findings support research that conclude that differences in socio-economic status will have differing results in body satisfaction. There is a paucity of research studies addressing socio-economic status in body image literature, and these have conflicting results (Grogan, 2008). Internationally, researchers hypothesise that mass media communication and technology such as the internet has resulted in all socio-economic statuses being subjected to the same 'body shape ideal' messages (Wykes & Gunther, 2005). However in South Africa, Senekal, Steyn, Mashego, and Nel (2001) found differences between women from rural and urban backgrounds in terms of body image. This is an area of inquiry that should be further researched.

Regarding children, an international study where Striegel-Moore, Schreiber, Pike, Wilfley and Rodin (1995) compared 613 Black and White pre-adolescent girls for drive for thinness and found that Black girls were significantly more driven to be thin compared to White girls, which is a controversial finding as the majority of previous studies have found the opposite result (Grogan, 2008). The study did not control for socio-economic class. This result is somewhat supported by South African studies which have found higher negative scores on the Eating Attitudes Test for Black adult and adolescent South African females (Sheward, 1994; Le Grange et al., 1998; Wassenaar, Le Grange, Winship & Lachenicht, 2000). However, a study conducted in the USA (Streigel-Moore et al., 1995) found that Black females are significantly less likely to suffer from eating disturbances such as anorexia nervosa, but in South Africa two prevalence studies of eating disorders concluded that Black females are as likely to develop eating disorders as White females (Szabo and Hollands, 1997; Le Grange et al., 1998). These studies were conducted with adult and adolescent females. However, a local study by Caradas et al. (2000), researching pre-adolescent South African girls, concluded that in South Africa, abnormal eating attitudes and negative body image satisfaction are occurrences that are found among all groups of girls, irrespective of their

race and ethnic background. This study further concluded that girls in South Africa are at equal risk of developing an eating disorder, irrespective of their 'racial category' (Caradas et al., 2000). The intensity of body image dissatisfaction varied between the different racial groups with White girls demonstrating significantly more body concerns than Black girls. However, the latter are by no means excluded from body concerns (Caradas et al., 2000). A similar study conducted to determine abnormal eating attitudes among 11-year old urban South African girl children, found that abnormal eating attitudes were generally low in this age group, and that no significant differences existed between White and Black girls (Petersen, Norris, Pettifor & MacKeown, 2006). Petersen et al. (2006) also found that Black girls showed a greater tendency toward dieting, compared to White girls. They concluded that the acceptance of the larger traditional Black figure was diminishing toward a value of thinness for these Black girls, due to acculturation. These findings suggest that the focus should be shifted away from racial differences and toward socio-economic status, in order to provide better understanding of body image pressures experienced by women from different socio-economic status backgrounds.

Puoane, Tsolekile and Steyn (2010) conducted a study with Black girls of ages 10 to 18 in the Cape Town area. They conducted a number of focus groups with girls from different age groups. Their findings contradicted what Petersen et al. (2006) had found – Two thirds of the girls in their study viewed being fat as a sign of wealth and happiness (Puoane, Tsolekile & Steyn, 2010). Being fat was socially acceptable, while being thin was mainly associated with HIV and AIDS (Puoane, Tsolekile & Steyn, 2010). Further research needs to be conducted locally, controlling for variables such as socio-economic status, and urban and rural settings, as currently there is not enough evidence to conclusively state whether differences are because of ethnicity, acculturation, or socio-economic status. Another variable often considered is gender, a central theme within body image literature. Among a variety of instruments measuring body dissatisfaction, girls were shown to desire a thinner body size than boys (Gardener et. al, 1997; Grogan, 2008; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Thelen et al., 1992). These differences are not as pronounced or significant in earlier childhood (compared to adolescence) and the general consensus is that gender differences become significant at around age 8, and increases with age (Gardener et al. 1997; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Thelen et al., 1992).

Studies have concluded that the majority of females, including young girls, prefer a thinner body shape, even if their current body weight is normal or even underweight, reiterating the societal pressures placed upon females and the experience of normative discontent (Grogan, 2008; Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004). The manner in which gender differences are examined requires attention. Kostanski, Fisher and Gullone (2004) examined the manner in which studies have compared genders and the direction of body dissatisfaction, and found that in most instances

it was linear, assuming that a person experiencing discontent with their body would desire a thinner body ideal. However, for males, the relationship was found to be curvilinear with some men and boys desiring a 'bigger' body shape, thus experiencing body dissatisfaction because they perceived themselves as being too thin (Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004). This is not the case for females, as the majority of females who are classified as underweight experience minimal body dissatisfaction. However, both males and females deemed being overweight as unacceptable, with varying degrees of disapproval between the genders (Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004). The focus of the particular research is the experiences of girl children. A lack of published research exists for boys' experiences, however, and this is an area that deserves further inquiry.

2.5 Dieting as a result of body dissatisfaction

A behavioural indicator of body dissatisfaction is the need to change the shape of the body by means of dieting, exercising, using anabolic steroids, plastic surgery, purging or even using laxatives (Grogan, 2008). Empirical research among pre-adolescent girls has mainly focused on dieting practices or the awareness of dieting. Paucity exists for other weight control measures such as exercising and purging among pre-adolescents.

Dieting which involves the intentional restriction of food and eating behaviours has also been linked with high levels of body image dissatisfaction (Kostanski & Gullone, 1999), but little research has been done on the predictors of early emergence of dieting (Sinton & Birch, 2005). For adolescents, factors such as "family dynamics, psychological functioning, body satisfaction, and weight concerns, maternal eating behaviours and attitudes, and child weight status" influence the onset of dieting and it is hypothesised that the same may be true for children (Sinton & Birch, 2005, p. 346). Kostanski and Gullone (1999, p. 488) stated "of concern is the fact that some children indicate that they engage in dieting..." This is particularly unhealthy for children as they are still developing and have less body fat compared to adults, which makes them vulnerable to emaciation and other disorders such as gastric ruptures and convulsions (Kostanski & Gullone, 1999). Rolland et al. (1997), as cited in Kostanski & Gullone, 1999), found that 40% of females between the ages of 8 and 12 years attempted to lose weight as a result of experiencing body dissatisfaction. Similarly, Hill and Pallin (1997) found that dieting was a concept well known by British 8-year olds, and that self-worth and BMI were greatly related to the awareness of dieting. Children who have a higher BMI experience higher levels of body image dissatisfaction (Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000b). As BMI increases, self-esteem and self-worth decrease, while the drive for thinness increases, as well as the likelihood of engaging in dieting behaviour (Hill et al., 1992, Oliver & Thelen, 1996, Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000a, Vander Wal & Thelen 2000b).

Children also receive social cues from their parents, especially their mothers, about dieting practices, and may either model similar behaviour or are told by a parent to engage in such behaviour (Hill & Pallin, 1997; Ogle & Damhorst, 2005). Sinton and Birch (2005, p. 351) stated that “a combination of individual and family characteristics measured at ages 5 and 7 can predict the emergence of dieting in girls at age 9...” It is also possible for the early onset of dieting to encourage overeating and the possibility of increased weight gain, which can result in a cycle of dieting and further weight gain even before the onset of adolescence (Sinton & Birch, 2005). Dieting should be viewed as the manifestation of body dissatisfaction, which is a complex result of the various factors discussed in this chapter. Dieting can lead to problematic eating behaviours in adolescence and adulthood, and is a strong predictor for eating disorders (Sinton & Birch, 2005). Dieting behaviour, as opposed to healthy eating attitudes, should be guarded against in childhood, which emphasises the need to promote a healthy body image.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the history and conceptual foundations that have shaped body image literature. Specific to pre-adolescents, I presented the available empirical evidence in a systematic way, separately discussing body dissatisfaction and the main factors that contribute to it, and finally concluding with dieting, a strong behavioural indicator of body dissatisfaction. This systematic layout was chosen to make sense of the plethora of information on body image, and to narrow it down to the lesser studied field of pre-adolescents.

The most dominant theme in body image literature is the “pursuit of the thin ideal” which sets out from the premise that women desire a body shape that is usually thinner than their own and would go to great lengths to achieve this ideal (Pine, 2001). This is true for the most part, with many studies, as mentioned throughout this chapter, supporting this notion. Studies focusing on positive body image and the factors that predict it are lacking for both women and pre-adolescent girls. Similarly, research into individuals who have not internalised this ideal, and who possibly are resilient to the societal pressures placed on women and girls, also need to be explored.

The role of socio-economic status and in South Africa, the differences between urban and rural women, should be given more attention in research related to body satisfaction. In South Africa particularly, where the focus is very much on racial differences, the inclusion of socio-economic variables may provide insight in the inconclusive racial comparisons that exist at present.

This chapter forms a necessary background in which to interpret the following chapters that deal with the methodology and research findings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to give an outline of how the research process was structured and in which research paradigm it was situated. The chapter also provides information regarding the sampling, data collection and data analysis procedures used during the research process.

3.2 Research paradigm

The research literature on the topic of body image have found that females are subjected to societal pressures regarding the thin ideal more often when compared to males (Grogan, 2008; Levine & Smolak, 1996; Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1986). Gender differences regarding body image-concerns already exist at a very young age, with girls reporting higher body image dissatisfaction compared to boys (Collins, 1991; Lawrence & Thelen, 1995; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001). These findings highlight the prevailing and often unrealistic constructions of how the female body should look. At the most basic level, feminism is a school of thought that recognises and acknowledges that our social world is organised according to gender (Brayton, 1997). In line with the empirical findings of body image literature and the aim of this dissertation, feminist standpoint theory will be used as the paradigm in which to locate this research. To do this, I will describe the basic components of feminist research and the main tenets of feminist standpoint theory in order to localise the research in the chosen paradigm.

3.3 Feminist research and Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminism is based on the premises that women across the world are all subjected to some form of oppression, that the causes and sustainers of this oppression should be understood and uncovered, and that an effort should be made to end this oppression (Maguire, 1987). These being the basic tenets of feminism, it is clear that, when working within a feminist research paradigm, research is not just a process to gain knowledge but also forms a base for activism. Research should provide real insights into the life world of women and should strive to actively improve the life world of all women. Writers such as Mies (1983) advocate that research needs to challenge the status quo and contribute to equity between men and women.

Feminist research is guided by feminist theory resulting in three important differentiators from other research paradigms: Firstly, feminist research actively seeks to remove the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched; secondly it is committed to changing social inequality;

and thirdly, it is rooted in the experiences and standpoints of women (Reinharz, 1992). Attempting to engage with and acknowledge the possible power imbalance between the researcher and the participant is fundamental to a feminist approach to research (Brayton, 1997; Reinharz, 1992). The researcher should be aware of her social location and the role she plays in shaping the outcome of the research (Lather, 1988). In addition, the researcher needs to reflect critically upon her own life world, experiences, and frame of reference as she is also an active participant in the research process (Weston, 1988).

Practically, research from the feminist perspective does not mean that one should simply add women to the process; rather it implies that women's realities and experiences should be understood, valued, and studied in the larger context in which women function (Lenz, 2004). Researchers should accurately represent the meanings and experiences of women by attending to the language they use to construct their realities. Women should be allowed to describe their meanings in their own words and this should become the basis of all research processes (Lather, 1988).

In the context of this study, the research made use of feminist standpoint theory as the guiding theory. This theory is not only suitable because the participants are female but it also supports the purpose of the research which is to explore the life world of the pre-adolescent girl when it comes to issues surrounding the body (Hekman, 2000). Feminist standpoint theory holds that all knowledge is situated and located within a certain context, and that one must acknowledge the standpoint of women as privileged in order to understand the "truth" of women's reality (Hartsock, 1983; Hekman, 2000). Similarly, to gain access to the life world of pre-adolescents, it is more suitable to centre the research on the pre-adolescent girls' experiences, as opposed to engaging with their parents, for example. The notion of truth has been revisited in contemporary feminist standpoint theory, in that the focus has shifted towards the deconstruction of dominant ideologies in order to gain a better understanding of how marginalised groups function in a society where dominant and subjected views and practices exist (Hekman, 2000; Lenz, 2004). Contemporary feminist standpoint theory has evolved to be less concerned with truth and more involved in understanding the challenges women face in a society that still upholds unequal ideals (Lenz, 2004). Harding (1991) states that less distorted views of social relations and phenomena will be achieved if research is rooted in, and begins with the standpoint of the particular group being oppressed. Harding (1991) further states that research which departs from the standpoint of the marginalised group and focuses on their lived experiences will offer 'stronger objectivity', as more relevant, objective research can be produced with the inclusion of these groups. Feminist standpoint theory sets out to map and explain the way in which dominant institutions organise the oppression and domination of marginalised groups, especially women (Harding, 2004, p. 30).

According to Harding (2004), standpoint theory “shifts the question from how to eliminate politics from science to two different questions, namely “which politics advance and which obstruct the growth of knowledge” and, “for whom do such politics advance or obstruct knowledge?”

The main tenets of feminist standpoint theory and the application thereof will be briefly mentioned in this particular study:

3.3.1 Life experience structures one’s understanding of life

This principle relates to the underpinning genesis of feminist standpoint theory, that marginalised groups have privileged access to the nature of the societal structures that support the continued oppression (Swigonski, 1994). Locating a standpoint involves an objective location that can be determined by rooting the research in the experiences of a certain group of people. In this case the departure point is the life experiences of female pre-adolescents in South Africa.

3.3.2 Members of the most and the least powerful groups will potentially have opposed understandings of the world

The dominant group will have incomplete views of the life world under investigation, as it is mostly in their interest to maintain the dominance, while the oppressed group will offer a more complete and ‘all round’ view, as they have no vested interest in sustaining the oppression or status quo (Collins, 1990, Swigonski, 1994). The marginalised group in this particular instance would be women, as they are mostly affected by the thin ideal, which results in ‘normative discontent’ in terms of body image. While the oppressor would be the societal pressures (taking the form of the media, family, males, and peers) that advocate unrealistic body ideals. The departure point would be that pre-adolescent girls will have a privileged understanding or viewpoint of the various pressures that advocate a thin body ideal.

3.3.3 The less-powerful group’s standpoint has to be developed through education

Without reinterpreting reality and creating greater depth and comprehensiveness for the life world of the oppressed, the oppressed are likely to accept the dominant view (Swigonski, 1994). Knowledge can only be created by engaging with the relevant group and approaching the research ‘hands-on’ (Harding, 1991; Swigonski, 1994). It is therefore the role of the researcher to not only gain information but to also provide knowledge into the life world of those being researched, in order to advocate change and to provide the marginalised group with the necessary information to support their struggle. I intend to highlight those issues that pre-adolescent girls face with regard to

body image. This research can then possibly inform future research that can contribute to promoting a healthy body image.

3.3.4 The appropriate perspective for research activities is everyday life

“Beginning with everyday lives of marginalized groups reveals the ways in which the public world structures the private, everyday lives of marginalized groups in ways that are not immediately visible as those lives are lived” (Swigonski, 1994, p. 391). The research is rooted in the experiences of body image and dieting concerns among pre-adolescent girls. In this research, I used a vignette for data collection, in order to set the research within a real-life context.

3.3.5 Many others are not just outsiders, but also “outsiders within”

Women have increasingly gained more access to academic and research institutions in past years. Women have been excluded from these institutions in the past and were not always able to contribute to the production or direction of knowledge (Swigonski, 1994). With women being able to contribute to the knowledge creation process, it is possible to ascertain an ‘outsider within’ perspective, which allows for the relation between the dominant activities and beliefs of the ‘outside’ and those of the ‘inside’ to be better understood (Swigonski, 1994, Harding, 1991, Collins, 1986). As the researcher, I am also a woman, thus assuming an outsider-within position, but being an adult researching pre-adolescents, an outsider perspective still exists to some degree.

3.4 Sampling

I see it fit to discuss the method of sampling utilised in order to better understand how participants were chosen and recruited. The sampling approach used in this particular study is defined as non-probability sampling. This method of sampling is particularly applicable to the qualitative research method and also to the aims of the particular study, as the main objective is to explore and understand the topic at hand, rather than to generalise the findings back to a particular population.

3.4.1 Sampling procedures

I initially made use of purposive sampling, which is a method of sampling aimed at finding a specific person suitable for the research (Trochim, 2001), in this case, pre-adolescent girls between ages 9 and 12. This was done by approaching persons who were likely to have a daughter or acquaintance in this particular age group. In qualitative research, this method is very applicable as cases for study, in this instance pre-adolescent girls are selected because they are

“information-rich” and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). Sampling, then, is aimed at insight and rich descriptions about the phenomenon, not empirical generalisation from a sample to a population (as in quantitative survey research). The sample size then becomes superfluous as each case is treated as unique and important (Patton, 2002). I considered these factors and decided to interview ten girls. A pilot interview was also conducted to test the flow of the data collection instrument and to determine whether the vignette I had prepared made sense to a pre-adolescent girl. The pilot proved crucial as my initial expectation was to interview each girl for approximately one hour, but after the pilot, I realised that the interview was much shorter and that keeping the attention of the child became more difficult the longer the interview went on. With this in mind, I made subtle changes to the vignette to ensure it was brief and concise but still allowed for in-depth insights to emerge. I decided to include this interview in the eventual data set. With the pilot included, a total of 11 interviews were achieved. I recruited participants to include both Black and White respondents, in order to have perspectives from girls with ‘differing’ racial backgrounds, as differences had been noted in previous research. The eventual pool of respondents included 6 Black respondents and 5 White respondents.

The sampling was restricted to the Gauteng Province in the greater Pretoria and Johannesburg area, South Africa.

3.5 Participants

In total, 11 girls were interviewed during the month of September 2009. I decided not to gather biological information such as weight and length as it would not be constructive to the research process or to the experience of the process by the girls. The participant details are presented in the table below:

Participant Number:	Age	Race
1	10 years	White
2	10 years	White
3	11 years	Black
4	10 years	Black
5	10 years	Black
6	12 years	White
7	9 years	White
8	11 years	Black
9	9 years	Black
10	11 years	Black
11	11 years	White

Table 1

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Data Collection Instrument

Data collection was done by means of in-depth interviews using a vignette. Hazel (1995, p. 2) defines the vignette as “concrete examples of people and their behaviours on which participants can offer comment or opinion”. This technique furthermore is also useful as the participants are still very young and may have difficulties articulating their experiences through direct questioning (Barter & Renold, 2000). The vignette offers a realistic yet safe environment for the participants to express themselves (Barter & Renold, 2000). The vignette was chosen as the most suitable manner of data collection, as it eliminates over-claim and social desirability which can be associated with direct questioning, especially in the case of younger children (Pine, 2001). This technique is often associated with the qualitative paradigm, as it offers participants the opportunity to define social situations in their own words and on their own terms (Finch, 1987). Children are worthy of being researched in their own right and not only in relation to how adult researchers conceptualise their life world (Barter & Renold, 2000). The use of the vignette thus gave the girls an opportunity to express their experiences and feelings in their own subjective way.

The vignette was administered along with pictures of girls with different body shapes. Two sets of pictures were used. One set included two White girls, one thin and another overweight, while the

other set included two Black girls, one thin and another overweight. The pictures were generic 'stock photos' gathered from an online image library. Girls were then given a brief hypothetical scenario, which included giving the girls in the pictures names, mentioning that they also went to a similar school as the girls being interviewed and that one of her favourite things to do is go to the movies. I opened the discussion by asking what the participant thought the girl bought at the movies and what type of movies she likes, before delving into what kind of a girl she is, what her likes and dislikes are and how she felt about her body. The vignette was semi-structured and mostly flowed from the information provided by the participant. I facilitated discussion around the opinions and comments expressed by the participant to the point where I felt saturation had been reached in the interview.

3.6.2 Data Collection Procedure

Once I found a girl who fitted the respondent profile, the mother of the potential respondent was approached. This was done by calling the mother of the prospective participant and explaining the purpose of the research to her. As the participants are all children, legal consent was required from the parent however, a child assent form was also provided, explaining the process to the girl to make sure that she was in fact willing to participate in the research. The parent and girl were given consent forms to read and sign before the interview could commence (See Appendix A). Girls were interviewed on a one-on-one basis in order to allow myself to establish rapport with the participant without the distraction of other participants. The mothers were not present during the interview for the same reasons.

Interviews were conducted in the homes of the respondents or in a school classroom if the interview took place directly after school. The majority of respondents were fluent in English and interviews were conducted in this language. Permission was requested from the girl for the interview to be recorded in the child assent form and this was established again before the interview commenced. In addition to the recording, detailed notes were taken.

After data collection I transcribed the data verbatim, while listening to the recordings. The transcriptions along with the relevant field notes were compared for the analysis procedure.

3.6.3 Ethical Considerations

During the proposal phase of this dissertation, ethical clearance was obtained through the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria. By gaining clearance from the committee, one commits to following procedures that consider informed consent to participate: confidentiality; consequences

of the research; and how the result will be disseminated. These matters were very important, due to the research involving children and issues such as informed consent and confidentiality were treated with great care. Following Brinkmann and Kvale (2008), I will highlight the ethical considerations and procedures used in this research project.

Informed consent was obtained from both the girl and her parent (in all instances the mother) by means of the informed consent forms approved by the University of Pretoria. These are attached as Appendix A. These consent forms informed the participant and her mother of the purpose of the research, their right to decline participation and to withdraw at any stage, the potential consequences of participating in the research, the benefits of the research, and the confidentiality of the research. In the consent form I also obtained permission from the participant's parent to record the interview. My contact number was also provided should they have required more information or needed to contact me.

It was required by the Ethics Committee that I provide an assent form for the girls participating, in order to provide them with detailed information on the research and the purposes for which it was conducted. This form was written in more simple language and the girls were asked to sign the form. Although this assent did not hold any legal purpose, it was used mainly to also provide the girl with the opportunity to decline to participate and to make sure she understood what the research was for and how she would be involved. This was also explained again before I commenced the interview. Permission from the child to record the interview was also obtained in the assent form, but also informally once again before the interview commenced. I also gave the participants the opportunity to ask any questions before the interview began.

The main purpose of informed consent is to make the participant aware that participation is completely voluntary and that they have the right to decline to participate and to terminate the interview at any stage, without any consequences to them personally (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Also discussed in the informed consent were matters such as who would have access to the results and how the results would be used. This was explained in a simplified manner to the girls, while their mothers were provided with appropriate information regarding the nature of the study and how the results were to be disseminated.

Another ethical consideration is confidentiality. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2008), anonymity should be explained to participants and they should be reassured that no identifiable characteristics would be revealed at any stage throughout the research. This was explained in both the child assent and informed consent forms and participants were again reassured before commencing the interview, that what they say will not be linked to them personally in any way, so

they can be honest and candid. Furthermore, to ensure this, I coded each participant with a number and throughout the dissertation referred to her by means of this number. Where participants mentioned the names of friends or family, the names were removed and replaced with a placeholder indicating that the information had been censored.

At the end of the interview, participants were also debriefed by once again explaining the purpose of the research and how they had contributed. They were also thanked for their cooperation. Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) concur with this and place importance on the consequences of the research and the researcher's role to address these consequences. Qualitative interviews, especially in psychology, can often result in "quasi-therapeutic relationships" especially when a sensitive matter is discussed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008, p. 267). It is the researcher's role to be mindful of these potential situations in order to minimise the potential harm of participating. Body image can become a sensitive topic, especially when possible eating disturbances are present. At the end of the interview I talked with the girls informally to ask how they felt after talking with me and the majority stated that it was fun and enjoyable. As researcher, I was very aware that sensitive information was discussed and of my responsibility to, first of all, direct the interview to avoid topics that cause distress, and second, to act in a responsible manner should I notice any destructive eating attitudes or reported behaviour. Fortunately, this was not necessary, as no such extreme behaviour was noted in any of the 11 interviews. The benefits of participation should also be discussed when taking the consequences of the research into consideration (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). This particular research had no direct benefit for the participant other than her role in contributing to academic knowledge. Participants were offered juice and some snacks during the interview, but no other incentive was offered for participation.

Finally, Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) consider recognising the role of the researcher as an important ethical consideration. In qualitative research, the researcher does not only analyse the data, but she is also often the person gathering and obtaining the data, making her the primary vehicle for obtaining knowledge (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). I discuss my role in the research later in this chapter in the section termed 'reflexivity'.

3.7 Data Analysis

3.7.1 Organising the data

After data collection, the recorded interviews were transcribed and read repeatedly. The transcriptions were compared to the field notes made during data collection and also to the

literature read. This allowed me to make sense of the volume of information in order to identify the themes and patterns prevalent in the data.

3.7.2 The process of analysis - Thematic Analysis

Data gathered was analysed by means of a thematic data analysis. Thematic data analysis entails searching for themes that emerge from data pertaining to a specific phenomenon (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Thematic data analysis is characterised by a process that involves coding incidents and representing these incidents in eventual themes. This is mainly done by immersing oneself within the data and by constantly reading and re-reading the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). The process can be described as pattern recognition, whereby a coding process is implemented in order to identify and describe emerging themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Coding involves identifying a relevant or important incident and encoding it prior to interpreting the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Codes are then organised and woven together to form descriptive themes that interpret and describe the phenomenon at hand (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Reinharz (1992) holds that when analysing data from a feminist perspective, one is not only dealing with existing data or texts, but also with that which is not explicitly stated in the data - the missing texts. It is imperative, therefore, to take into account that the research is set in a broader social context consisting of many discourses related to the female body ideal. The emergent data therefore are not stable truths and generalisations, but rather are a product of the complex social environment in which both the researcher and participant find themselves (Reinharz, 1992). As the results chapter will reveal, 'missing texts' were very prevalent in the data collected and this will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

3.7.3 Generating code and themes

After repeatedly reading the transcribed material, I organised the interviews into broad categories relating to overall body satisfaction. This served as a starting point to find the underlying relationships and shared meanings. After following a colour coding approach to make sense of the data, I coded certain parts of the transcriptions and organised these codes and verbatim interviews in an Microsoft Excel sheet to break the data down further. The Excel sheet showed the code number, code name and verbatim response. This allowed me to have a systematic view of the data. When I needed clarity on the verbatim or code, I again referred back to the transcriptions to understand the relevant context. Some of the codes were grouped together as they proved to be very similar. Subsequently, the consolidated codes were grouped into themes and named accordingly. These themes are:

1. Downplaying the importance of appearance
2. Pity parading as empathy
3. What I see is who you are
4. Maybe they tease you because you are fat
5. A lifelong diet
6. Body concerns

The themes are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

3.7.4 Testing the emergent themes against the data

In order to ensure that the generated themes are relevant and coherent, I compared the themes against the research questions and the available literature. The data proved to be useful and relevant and coincided with many of the findings in the literature whilst also shedding light on issues that have not been thoroughly researched. Some of the emergent themes led me to explore other avenues of literature that were not initially included in the review. This led to the expansion of the literature review as a whole. Some of the findings could not be substantiated with published literature as the topics had not been researched or not explored in depth.

3.7.5 Writing the report

After spending a considerable amount of time analysing the data, I interpreted the data and organised it according to the emergent themes and their salient characteristics, and highlighted the inter-connectedness of the themes. By writing the report, I gave meaning to the codes and themes generated through the analysis procedure. The data proved to be very rich, with many intricate layers of interpretations, which were not always clear to me in the first instance, however, writing, re-writing and constantly reading and searching for relevant literature led to the eventual presentation of the results in Chapter 4.

3.7.6 Reliability and validity

It is not my aim to compare qualitative research with quantitative research. Terms such as reliability and validity have, however, come to be associated with a positivist stance, which have subsequently been criticised in qualitative research literature. These terms should not be totally disregarded, though. The researcher should rather strive for rigor and quality (Seale, 1999). This can be achieved by ensuring that the created knowledge is an accurate representation of the participant's experience (Bojé, 2000). This is done by self-reflexivity, breaking down power

inequalities between the researcher and the participant, and by allowing the participant to actively engage in the process of creating meaning (Bojé, 2000). The four constructs developed by Lincoln & Guba (1985, p. 290) serve as starting points in order to determine the soundness of the research:

3.7.6.1 Credibility

This entails the extent to which the research accurately described and identified the subject under investigation (De Vos, 1998). This can be done by means of a detailed description of all the variables and contexts that influence the research. Furthermore, it is also done by means of acknowledging the limitations and parameters of the study. Throughout this chapter I have provided a transparent account of how the research was approached and what factors influenced the chosen research problem, how this was researched and how the eventual conclusions were drawn. Furthermore, I dedicated a section of this report to discuss the limitations of the study.

3.7.6.2 Transferability

This is the extent to which the results can be generalised back to the population from which it originated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is generally done by means of triangulation, the process of cross referencing other data sources with the findings of the particular study, or by guiding the study by stringent theories and models. The purpose of this research study was to explore the body and dieting concerns of pre-adolescent girls to provide a starting point for further research that can address the paucities in the current literature. Generalisability was thus not one of the main aims of this study. The literature review was also not done in isolation from the rest of the research process but rather was continuously implemented in order to triangulate the data collected with the already existing data. The emergent themes were compared to the available literature, and where information emerged that was not included in the initial literature review, I conducted another literature search to determine whether this information was found in other research as well.

3.7.6.3 Dependability

This is the qualitative alternative to reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability is not given as much attention in qualitative research as it is in quantitative research, for the main reason that each research process is unique in time and context, thus making replicability difficult (Silverman, 2000). Reliability is further reflected in my ability to accurately represent the experiences of the

participants and this was continuously cross-verified with the participants by means of clarifying questions and paraphrasing.

3.7.6.4 Conformability

In keeping with the feminist standpoint theory departure point, it is not possible to study participants from an objective point of view. Rather, I consciously became a part of the research process in order to co-create the discussion and overall research process. Reflexivity was done throughout the project, in order to ensure that the conformability of the research was of good quality.

3.7.7 Reflexivity

Parker (1994) asserts that reflexivity is a crucial and unique feature of the qualitative research process. It is the process of critically reflecting upon the self, as researcher, and on the role played in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Reflexivity not only compels us to critically reflect on our role in the research process but it also allows us to come to terms with the “multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). The subjective nature of the researcher and those being studied form an important part of the research process, and as a result should not be denied (Banister et al., 1994). Reflexivity acknowledges the researcher’s effect on the research process, but also that the research may have an effect on the individuals studied, especially because the topic is personally relevant to the participants (Banister et al., 1994). With this in mind, I reflect on the present research by drawing from the feminist research ethic set forth by Ackerly and True (2008), who argue that empirical research can be improved when researchers commit themselves to inquiry related to the way in which one inquires.

Firstly, the research ethic involves being attentive to epistemology. Ackerly and True (2008, p. 695) state: “An epistemology is the system of thought that we use to distinguish fact from belief. An epistemology is itself a belief system about what constitutes knowledge, evidence, and convincing argument, and how scholarship contributes to these. Our epistemology has significant authority in our research.” In terms of the feminist research ethic, being attentive to epistemology entails being aware of how we went about formulating the research question and how the subsequent research activities, such as the methodology, analysis and presenting of findings are set forth (Ackerly & True, 2008). Feminist research ethic acknowledges that the formulation of a research question is not always informed within the setting of a university or organisation, but that the very formulation of the question possibly has its roots in dominant discourses or personal experiences (Ackerly & True, 2008). The ‘pre-academic’ origins of this dissertation, as set out in chapter one, describes

the non-academic events and influencers that led to the formulation of this particular research question.

Secondly, Ackerly and True (2008, p. 696) state that feminist research ethic entails one to be “attentive to boundaries and their power to marginalize.” This involves acknowledging the boundaries that influence inclusion and exclusion, both of knowledge and subjects (Ackerly & True, 2008). It is important to acknowledge that disciplinary boundaries exist – I was more interested in research conducted within psychology, and therefore was more attentive to literature from this discipline opposed to research from other disciplines. I am aware that other disciplines also contribute valuable and important information to the subject of this dissertation, given different contexts. It is also important to acknowledge the inclusion and exclusion of research participants and the boundaries that exist due to their subsequent inclusion or exclusion. I chose to interview 11 pre-adolescent girls within the Pretoria and Johannesburg areas. The inclusion of these participants may have had advantages for them as they discussed their own and others’ body concerns. The process of thinking about body concerns may have altered their behaviour or thinking, as the research process itself is likely to produce or even reproduce power differences (Ackerly & True, 2008). By excluding certain girls from this project (i.e. girls from other provinces) they could have been excluded from the possible [positive and/or negative] effects of the research. Furthermore, the result of this study is bound by these 11 girls and what they conveyed in their interviews. The results do not serve as universal truths and I am mindful of this.

Thirdly, feminist research ethic compels the researcher to be attentive to relationships. These include the social, political and economic relationships that exist in the actions and information conveyed by research participants as well as those that affect us and others (Ackerly & True, 2008). “A feminist-informed ethical perspective makes us attentive to the privilege of being able to do research and to the power relationships that are a part of the research process” (Ackerly & True, 2008, p. 701). Upon commencing the interviews, I realised that in some sense I was viewed not only as a stranger to the majority of the participants, but also an outsider. I was an adult, while the participants were pre-adolescent girls, which possibly created a power imbalance. Being an adult could have possibly led to the girls thinking that I would not be able to understand how they felt about certain topics or what they have experienced, possibly resulting in their remaining silent. Another possibility is that my ‘outsider’ position may have resulted in the oversight of important information that I would not be able to understand due to not experiencing similar events during my own childhood. Furthermore, to the Black girls I was a White female adult. It is naive to assume that they do not perhaps have pre-existing ideas with regard to the power imbalances between racial groups that came to define our country pre-1994 and to some extent still do. My position of being a White woman could have also prevented me from fully understanding the Black girls’ daily

experience. Furthermore, I am what the girls may consider as ‘skinny,’ and considering the research topic, this was also a point of discussion, as some respondents commented on my weight. Throughout the interviews, I was very aware of these factors, and in keeping with the reflexive and ethical research practice, acknowledge that these factors may have biased the research to some extent.

Finally, feminist research ethic requires that the researcher take cognisance of her own situatedness as researcher (Ackerly & True, 2008). This can be viewed as the overarching principle of the feminist research ethic, as it involves the researcher having to engage in critical reflexivity, taking into account how her own subjectivity influenced the research process, from conceptualisation to the eventual presenting of results (Ackerly & True, 2008). By engaging in critical reflexivity, I am capable of presenting the findings as accurately as I possibly can, taking my own situatedness into account. My role as researcher, White, thin and adult, influenced me to code, label and interpret the results from within my frame of reference. By acknowledging these aspects, I hope to provide more context to the results garnered.

In the next chapter, the results will be discussed, and these findings are presented in the context of these various reflections.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter set out and explained the logistical, methodological, ontological and epistemological implications of the research study. The aim of the chapter was to explain how the research was conducted and how it is situated within a broader research/academic and societal context. Feminist standpoint theory was discussed in order to highlight the overarching paradigm in which the research was conducted and issues surrounding reliability and validity were discussed within the qualitative paradigm. Lastly, attention was given to reflexivity and to my influence as researcher on the findings and research process. The following chapter will discuss the findings from the collected data.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and interpretation of the data collected. The themes discussed in this chapter are the themes that consistently emerged throughout the interviews with the girls and are presented separately with verbatim quotations to better illustrate the themes and to do so in the voice of the participant. Participant verbatim reports are provided exactly as they were uttered for the purpose of this dissertation. After each verbatim a number is noted, this is the number of the participant as indicated in table 1 in Chapter three. The results and discussion are presented together to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the themes as they are engaged with, opposed to having them stand separate of, my interpretation.

In describing the results, mention will be made to the pictures used in the vignette. These included a thin and a heavier girl, who were given names as part of the vignette. For purposes of clarity, I will explicitly state to which girl the participant is referring where necessary by indicating whether it was the heavier or thin girl in brackets.

The following six salient themes emerged and these will be discussed separately:

- Downplaying the importance of appearance
- Pity parading as empathy
- What I see is who you are
- Maybe they tease you because you are fat
- A lifelong diet
- Body concerns

4.2 Downplaying the importance of appearance

The data collected revealed an interesting paradox between what girls claimed or directly expressed when it came to the importance of beauty, appearance, and weight, and what their perceptions and ultimate behaviour suggests regarding the matter. Girls were asked whether they thought appearance and weight were important. Many girls also referred to religion and their conviction that God made everyone beautiful, which one would assume is commonly taught in religious classes or by parents who teach their children about religion and respect for other human beings.

- “...all of us are God’s children and all of us are beautiful, whatever we look like we are beautiful...” (6)

I did not gather information regarding the girls’ religious backgrounds, however it is speculated that the majority of girls were from a Christian upbringing and as such these ideas are prevalent. South Africa is also a religious society, and these religions also purport specific information regarding women and their bodies, this was not specifically explored in this dissertation, but acknowledging this context serves to better understand these convictions. The majority of girls stated that weight and appearance are not important, and that beauty cannot be measured by these factors alone. To illustrate:

- “...it does not matter how you look, you can still be friends, you don’t have to play with a thin or a fat child” (2)

Only two girls felt that it was important to look a certain way and articulated this by stating:

- “They must be a little bit thin and not too fat” (1)
- “It does (matter how you look), thin people are a little sexier” (3)

Both these girls were slightly heavier than the majority of girls interviewed and it is possible that they perhaps experience the pressure to be thin more intensely compared to the other girls. Literature suggests that girls with a higher BMI are more likely to experience higher levels of body dissatisfaction and will subsequently have a stronger desire to be thin (Gardener et al., 1997; Oliver & Thelen, 1996; Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000b). Girls with a higher BMI are also more likely to receive direct messages regarding their weight status like being encouraged by their parents to alter their eating behaviours or to engage in dieting practices (Sinton & Birch, 2005; Thelen & Cormier, 1995). These children are also more susceptible to indirect messages stemming from peers and media about weight and as a result compare themselves to others, increasing the likelihood of body dissatisfaction (Stice, Maxfield & Wells, 2003).

Overall, the conviction was that looking a certain way and more specifically, being thin, was not important. However the data gathered throughout the interviews did not support this notion. One respondent stated the following, which clearly indicates the conflict between what is socially acceptable to believe, and what society purports:

- ‘No, it is not important, but fat people...I feel sorry for them. I want them to be thin like us, but Jesus made them and handicapped children.’ (7)

This statement is also significant as the respondent somehow connected being overweight with people who are handicapped or disabled in some way. This statement also illustrates how overweight girls are perceived as abnormal or that empathy needs to be expressed toward them. It further emphasises the contradiction between what girls are supposed to believe about those that are overweight (that weight does not matter, it is about who the person is), and the stereotypical characteristics that are already entrenched at this age.

Furthermore, when describing the two girls throughout the interview, the majority of girls gave more positive attributes to the thinner girl compared to the fatter girl. They went as far as to conclude that the fatter girl would be much happier and much less teased if she lost weight. Phillips and Hill (1998) found that being liked, feeling liked and being leaner were all factors associated with high levels of attractiveness, which coincides with the responses endorsing the thin ideal and negatively portraying the heavier girls in the pictures as less attractive and less liked.

As the subsequent themes will illustrate, being thin is privileged, negating the notion that appearance is not important. This denial of the importance of appearance can be interpreted as a socially acceptable or polite response. This has not been addressed in the academic literature and would also not be easy to detect in quantitative research relying on standardised measures. However, Phillips and Hill (1998) found a somewhat similar result when they evaluated the self-esteem and peer acceptance of obese pre-adolescents. They found that obese children generally rated the importance of social acceptance low and concluded that “this ‘denial’ of being liked could be a form of self-protection following occasions of past social rejection” (Phillips & Hill, 1998, p. 291). Their study was confined to obese pre-adolescents and replicating this study with children of normal weight ranges might prove insightful.

This theme is discussed first, as it forms an important undertone to all of the subsequent themes that emerged from the data. When interpreting the following themes, it is important to view the data within the context of this particular theme.

4.3 Pity parading as empathy

The perceived control over weight was a prominent theme in every interview. Some girls either stated spontaneously that the heavier girl in the picture couldn’t help that she was overweight, that she had no control over her own weight status, or responded with a similar response upon direct

probing. The responses mainly included that the girl being discussed was either born the way she is or that whatever has made her overweight was not necessarily her fault or due to her own behaviour. The majority of girls stated that the girl in question “could not help” the way she looked, and therefore had no control over her appearance. Responses included:

- “...That is just the way she is” (11)
- “It makes her feel sad because she knows that she was born like that.” (11)
- “Maybe she took her mother’s body...” (8)

A fewer number of respondents stated, however, that the girl is perhaps overweight because of her eating patterns. One respondent stated:

- “Maybe she eats too much...” (9)
- “She probably likes yummy and sweet stuff and food then she can’t help herself...” (9)

Musher-Eizenman et al. (2004), as cited in Holub (2008), found that children who believe that overweight people have no control over their weight, held fewer negative attitudes about being fat compared to children who believed that being overweight could be controlled. The exact reasons for this are still unknown, as very little research has been done about children’s’ perception of control and the subsequent effects it can have on body dissatisfaction and the types of attitudes held about overweight people.

However, a conflict again existed between what was conveyed regarding control. Although the majority of respondents stated that the heavier girl could not help that she was overweight, they all stated that she would be a much happier person if she did lose some weight. This is illustrated as follows:

- “If she loses weight she could be happy and boys would love her” (6)
- “Then more people can like her (if she loses weight) and she can be proud that she actually lost weight” (2)

These responses again indicate that the respondents’ initial answers relating to the importance of appearance and weight is only a polite response. As mentioned – most of the girls did not think that weight status or appearance was important, and simultaneously they also stated that the heavier girl in question had little or no control over her weight status. However, these girls

uniformly agreed that if the girl in question lost some weight, she would be much happier, and, in some instances, more liked.

These conflicting notions can be described in the context of pity and contempt. Stating that appearance is not important and that fat people have no control over their weight is condescending and masks the harsh reality of what the girls perceive overweight people to face: that they are met with feelings of contempt. This is illustrated by the link the girls made between being fat and being disabled or abnormal:

- “Because I think she does not want to be fat, she wants to be thin. I think she wants a normal body” (4)
- ‘No, it is not important, but fat people...I feel sorry for them. I want them to be thin like us, but Jesus made them and handicapped children.’ (7)

Phillips and Hill (1998) found that heavier girls were more likely to be socially rejected, to be perceived as unattractive and to experience feelings of isolation, strengthening the argument that being fat can result in being ostracised. These notions are covered or masked with superficial and patronising beliefs that being overweight cannot be controlled and that appearance is not important. Not only does this indicate to what extent the thin ideal is already entrenched into the minds of pre-adolescents but also to what extent messages that try to counter the superiority of the thin ideal have failed.

4.4 What I see is who you are

When describing the girls in the photographs, the thinner girl was perceived in more positive ways compared to the heavier girl. Respondents generally assigned more positive personality traits to the thinner girl, with the heavier girl receiving the occasional positive trait, but this was rare. Previous studies have concluded that thinner persons are more liked, perceived to be more intellectual, more social, more attractive, and even kinder, compared to obese and overweight persons who are often perceived as less intellectual, less social, and less healthy (Hill & Silver, 1995; Wardie, Volz & Golding, 1995). The current study revealed the same perceptions.

The thin girl was perceived as more attractive than the heavier girl, this was noted across all respondents, and no notable differences between the race groups were observed, without any support for the notion that being fat equals the absence of HIV or the presence of wealth, as observed by Mvo, Dick and Steyn (1999). It is possible that pre-adolescents do not yet ascribe these stereotypes to persons, or that a difference in social class may negate these factors, as all

the girls interviewed were from middle-class families in an urban setting. Some responses included the following with regard to the thin girl in the pictures:

- “She is cute and beautiful” (10)
- “She is pretty and she is thin and her hair is pretty” (1)

The majority of girls also wanted to be like the thin girl in the pictures mainly because she was perceived to be much more attractive compared to the other girl.

Interviewer: *“If you could be one of these two girls, which one would you want to be?”*

Respondent: *“Her (referring to picture of thin girl), because she’s nice and thin and she’s (referring to picture fatter girl) not as nice and thin as her.”* (6)

This perceived attractiveness was also the reason why the thin girl was perceived to be more popular and to have more friends and subsequently to be more likely to receive romantic attention. Being associated with the thin, attractive person was also described as elevating one’s social acceptability. The subsequent verbatim report illustrates how the thinner girl is the most popular girl, but when the larger girl is with the thinner girl, they are both popular, elevating the social status of the larger girl.

Interviewer: *“Who do you think is the most popular?”*

Respondent: *“Sarah (thin girl in picture), it looks like Julie (heavier girl in picture) is just being a plain old girl she has nothing to do with friends, something like that. And when they’re together, then they’re both popular, but when she’s alone, then she’s the most popular girl.”* (11)

Interviewer: *“Why do you think she is the most popular?”* (Referring to thin girl in picture)

Respondent: *“Because she is pretty. She has a lot of friends”*

Interviewer: *“And Julie?”* (Referring to heavier girl)

Respondent: *“Nobody likes her. Only one friend likes her”* (7)

Other than attractiveness and popularity, the thinner girl was also more highly associated with positive traits such as tidiness, kindness, friendliness and even leadership qualities. This can be illustrated by the following responses:

- “She will probably be popular because she is good in sport or popular, because she is a leader. I think she is a leader” (9)
- “I think she has a very friendly personality” (11)

- “She is cute and tidy” (10)

The thin girl was also perceived as being clever and favoured by the teacher, mostly because of her perceived intellect and attractiveness. One respondent remarked:

- “Because sometimes people love beautiful people... My mother, she is also a teacher, she loves the most beautiful girl in her class.” (6)

With regard to intellect, the thin girl was described as clever and bright:

- “She looks very well-behaved and stuff and she looks like she will do her work more than she would play around in class” (9)
- “She does good work. I think she is not naughty” (8)

Intellect and being the teachers favourite were also attributes given to the fatter girl. The contexts within which they were given differed, however. The girls who thought that the fatter girl was the teacher’s favourite mostly thought that it would be the case because the teacher feels sorry for the child in some way, once again highlighting that pity needs to be expressed toward heavier people. These findings support research that has concluded that thinner persons are more liked, perceived to be more intellectual, more social, more attractive, more popular, and even kinder compared to obese persons who are often perceived as less intellectual, less social, and less healthy (Grogan, 2008; Grogan & Richards, 2002; Hill & Silver, 1995; Tiggemann & Rothblum, 1988; Wardie, Volz & Golding, 1995).

Furthermore, the girls concluded that the thin girl was most likely to be in a romantic relationship or that she will receive more romantic interest from others:

- “She’s prettier and she’s got a style of wearing her clothes. She’s polite. They find her attractive.” (11)

One respondent indicated that, although the thinner girl is prettier and is more likely to have a romantic relationship the fatter girl may have someone, who is also similar to her in size, interested in her:

Interviewer: *“Who do you think has a special romantic friend?”*

Respondent: *“Maybe both of them, but maybe she (thinner girl in picture), because she is thin and she is pretty but she (heavier girl) is also pretty and there might be another boy that likes her and he might be fat and like her”* (1)

This observation coincides with a study conducted by Phillips and Hill (1998) who found in their study relating to obese pre-adolescent and peer acceptance that more than half of all obese and overweight children judged themselves as unattractive, and had this finding confirmed by their peers. This is a finding that deserves further research and investigation, as the girl who expressed that overweight people are romantically interested in other overweight people, could be classified as slightly overweight herself. She generally referred to herself as less attractive in the interview and therefore perhaps thinks she is not capable of generating interest from others unless they are also perceived as unattractive. It is possible that she feels others who are also overweight are perhaps more equal to her in terms of attractiveness and social acceptance, making the possibility for a relationship more likely.

The heavier girl was mostly just compared to the thinner girl and often described as less clever, popular and kind. However, the heavier girl was also associated with negative traits such as being a “rough girl” (2) and “strict and bossy” (1) while no such traits were associated with the thinner girl. The fatter girl was also perceived to be naughty in class by one respondent and as a girl “that never does her work right” (7). Although the heavier girl was ascribed few negative personality traits, it is important to compare this to the thinner girl who received no negative associations and the majority of positive associations.

4.5 Maybe they tease you because you are fat

The prevalence of teasing has been found to be high among pre-adolescents (Kostanski & Gullone, 2007) and the current research also found that the topic of teasing was one to which the majority of girls could relate, either directly (having been teased themselves) or indirectly (knowing of someone who is being teased). The scenario was posed very broadly to participants. They were told that both girls in the pictures are being teased at school and asked to describe why they think this is. The majority of participants immediately referred to the heavier girl and said that she was being teased. They were hesitant to say that it was mainly because of her weight and would often state that it is because of the way she dresses (although both girls were clad in school uniforms) and when elaborating further, also referred to her weight. This once again indicates that the girls felt that it is not appropriate to explicitly state that someone is fat or overweight. To illustrate:

Interviewer: *“Why do you say they tease Portia?”*

Respondent: *“Mostly it’s just because they don’t like her.”* (6)

Interviewer: *“Why do you think that is?”*

Respondent: *“Maybe it’s just that she’s fat, maybe she’s stupid or something like that. Maybe people are just teasing her just because they don’t like her”* (6)

Similarly, another respondent also stated:

Interviewer: *“Why do you say they tease her?”*

Respondent: *“Because she just never does her work right.... Also maybe, because she is maybe just a little fat...”* (7)

Another respondent said:

- *“Because they think she is the ugliest one in class, or maybe they don’t want to like her. Or because maybe she is fat and she has big feet.”* (8)

These responses indicate how cautious the respondents were to mention weight as a contributor to being negatively evaluated. This indicates that respondents know that being fat results in a person being socially rejected, however stating this explicitly will go against the grain of their religious convictions (that all God’s children are beautiful) and the socially acceptable notion that all persons should be accepted, irrespective of appearance.

When asked why the thinner girl was being teased, the respondents were mostly uncertain. Some girls stated that it is also because of her physical appearance, but the context differs. One respondent stated:

- *“Because many people don’t like girls if they are beautiful...maybe they are jealous”* (6)
- *“I think it is because she is very bright and clever so they are becoming jealous.”* (7)
- *“I don’t know, maybe they will tease her and say she is too thin...”* (2)

As mentioned in Chapter two the subject of teasing is mostly related to the child’s physical appearance (Kostanski & Gullone, 2007; Vander Wal & Thelen, 2000b; Rieves & Cash, 1996) and in this case was relevant for both girls in the picture with differing contexts. The heavier girl was teased because of her weight, which was also associated with being ‘stupid’ and ‘ugly’, while the thin girl was teased out of jealousy by peers who do not conform to this ideal. The message remains the same, those who do not conform to the thin and attractive ideal will be reviewed negatively overall, not just on their weight. Kostanski and Gullone (2007) concluded that teasing

has a negative effect on children's body image, and that children who are overweight are most likely to be victimised, although children who are perceived as underweight are also at risk of being teased. Body image concerns and levels of satisfaction are discussed in the next theme.

I asked the girls what they thought the girl who was being teased felt like when she was teased and all agreed that it must be a very negative experience. Some responses include:

- It's like my friend's problem where everybody teases her, but it's a very hard situation for her now, because she's very fat and I'm not trying to tease her or anything, but she's really, really upset. She came to me yesterday and she said, "What's wrong?" And I said, "Nothing." And I said to her, "Why are you upset?" and she said, "Everybody keeps on teasing me." (3)
- "She feels angry and sad, she actually wants to cry." (10)
- "It makes her feel sad because she knows that she was born like that." (4)

The latter statement again illustrates the perceived lack of control ascribed to heavier people and highlights how the importance of appearance and weight is underplayed. Although the participants agreed that appearance was not important, they still acknowledged that people who do not conform to the thin ideal are evaluated negatively by others (by being teased) and that these experiences do affect them in a negative way.

The subject of teasing was one the girls explained elaborately. These descriptions mainly related to the type of teasing and the perceived effect it had on the girl being teased. Many of the girls also shared examples from girls they know who are being teased or told of how they themselves are being teased. The type of teasing reported was mostly 'mean teasing' or name calling, and in some instances also hurtful teasing that includes acts of physical aggression (Warm, 1997). Examples of reported 'mean' teasing were articulated as follows:

- "They will say she is the Oros man and all that stuff, because the Oros man is very round you know. And they will maybe say she is fat and all of that stuff" (9)
- "They call her 'fatty'" (10)
- "Yes, there is a girl in my class, she is very fat and they tease her. They will say like "Hey, <girl's name>! You are too fat to move your desk!" (7)
- "I think they will say that she is too fat and make jokes of her." (4)
- "They say, you are ugly and you are fat!" (1)

Examples of hurtful teasing were also mentioned:

- “Maybe they pull her hair. It all depends on what the children are like. There are some kind, some bad, some nasty; it could be something like that.” (11)

Literature shows that peer teasing can contribute to a negative self-perception but that it is also harmless in some instances, however, the impact of teasing experienced is what leads to the eventual body dissatisfaction as some children can experience this taunting as extremely negative and may view the teasing as being truthful aspects about themselves (Cattarin & Thompson, 1994; Kostanski & Gullone, 2007, Warm, 1997).

4.6 A lifelong diet

Hill (1993) found that girls are often drawn to ways in which they can control their weight as this contributes to an improved sense of self-worth. This finding led Hill and Pallin (1998) to investigate the effects of dieting awareness on self-worth in 8-year-old girls. They found that a higher BMI and lower self-worth were very highly correlated with overall dieting awareness, although a causal direction could not have been established. I also investigated dieting awareness among the girls, and found that all but one girl knew what the word diet meant and what activities it entailed, and could give anecdotal evidence of a significant other engaging in dieting behaviour or personal accounts of engaging in dieting. Some of these responses included:

- “Umm... to not eat a lot like for a day or two” (3)
- “Diet means you do not like it to be fat and drink all those cold drinks, like Coke Zero and diet cold drinks, but I don’t really drink them” (9)
- “Diet, it means when you don’t eat a lot of food, let’s say you eat vegetables and you don’t eat too much.” (8)
- “Diet means you eat stuff that makes you thinner and you also go to gym” (7)
- “Diet means that you mustn’t eat more food, you must eat less food and you must like when you have lunch you must only eat bit by bit” (4)
- “It is when you eat healthy food to make you thin” (1)

As the verbatim illustrates, the majority of girls gave a definition of dieting that mostly involves restrictive food intake, with one respondent indicating that it also involves physical activity. Other respondents also stated that dieting requires eating “less sweets” (3) and “less potatoes because, sometimes when you eat a lot of potatoes you might get too fat.” This indicates that the girls are

clearly aware of what dieting entails and that certain foods according to them should be avoided. The verbatim relating to eating less potatoes or not eating as much for a day or two indicates that a healthy balanced diet is not what is advocated but rather restrictive eating or even “crash dieting”. These utterances confirm that engaging in some form of dieting such as eating “less sweets” or “healthy food to make you thin” is a normative state of being and a ‘pro-active’ way to conform to the thin ideal.

The girls were also asked where they acquired their knowledge of dieting, and the majority stated that their mothers or aunts were either engaging in dieting behaviour or conveyed a diet-related message to the girl.

Responses included:

- “My mother told me, she diets” (3)

Another stated:

- “My aunt and my mother went on a diet” (1)

This is in accordance with the findings of Kichler and Crowther (2001) that the role of the mother in the child’s body satisfaction is prominent, as she herself is pressured to be thin. The role of the mother has also been significant in a number of studies investigating body image satisfaction and dieting behaviour. A mother who engages in and models dieting behaviour is likely to have a daughter who will follow this pattern and mirror body image satisfaction similar to that of her mother (Ogle & Damhorst, 2003; Spitzack, 1990).

Girls were also asked if they themselves have ever engaged in dieting behaviour. The majority stated “no”, but that their mother, aunt or someone they know had been on a diet before. However, as mentioned, these girls have been on a lifelong diet as they are aware of what measures are needed to achieve a thin ideal, and these include not eating too many sweets, drinking light versions of cold drinks, eating foods that will make you thin or in more extreme cases, “not eating for a day or two”. Although they stated not ever being on a diet, their personal accounts of what dieting is reflect a lifelong diet that is reminiscent of a pro-active strategy to remain thin. Furthermore, Hill and Pallin (1998) found in their study examining dieting awareness in 8 year old girls, that girls were more likely to assign dieting behaviour to a fictional character than admit dieting practises of their own. The same may be true in this instance. Those who did state that they had been on diets articulated it as follows:

- “I wanted to lose weight. I was a fat child when I was in Grade 3. I was a very fat child. Now I’m fine. I drank special tea. But the tea was losing the weight, because it was like a special tea that makes girls lose weight. I lost 4 kilo’s while I was busy on that.” (11)
- “I was on a diet long ago when I was 9. My mom, she told me to eat special food that she made” (1)

Two other girls indicated that they were considering going on a diet:

- “Sometimes I think I must (diet). I eat a lot of junk sometimes” (10)
- “I want to eat less, sometimes I eat too much.” (3)

These accounts are described as by the girls in a very mature manner and provide insight into the manner in which dieting is perceived as a normal behaviour to attain a certain physical ideal. These accounts are disconcerting however, as the girls described the onset of their dieting a very young age, in this instance 9 years old. The early onset of dieting is of concern, as dieting is a strong predictor of overeating later in life, and in more extreme cases, the development of eating disorders (Kostanski & Gullone, 1999; Sinton & Birch, 2005).

In line with the high levels of dieting awareness, the girls also stated that the heavier girl in the picture would be happier if she lost weight, and offered a variety of ways in which she could achieve this. Some responses included:

- “Yes, she can eat healthy and not a lot of sweets and then she will be a little better. Salads and sometimes meat... “(1)
- “I think that she must gym and eat less food” (4)
- “Maybe if like there is a soccer place around, she could run in the morning and go to the gym and drink water “(5)

This again contradicts the notion that appearance is not important and that being over-weight cannot be controlled. By providing advice on how to lose weight, the patronising nature of these socially-acceptable statements are exposed.

Furthermore, these suggestions coincide with their definitions of what dieting means and again illustrate that dieting is perceived as an acceptable manner to attain a thinner body ideal, which will be more accepted by peers and will contribute to overall happiness. According to the girls, it is normal and acceptable for a young girl to restrict her intake of certain foods and to engage in

exercise to control her weight, change her body size, and in so doing, improve her self-worth and the manner in which she is viewed by her peers. However, the early onset of dieting and being aware of dieting practices can lead to body dissatisfaction and even disordered eating before the onset of adolescence (Sinton & Birch, 2005).

The next theme will discuss body image concerns and levels of body dissatisfaction.

4.7 Body concerns

One of the main aims of the research was to ascertain whether the pre-adolescent girls showed any signs of body dissatisfaction. Body image dissatisfaction is most elevated during puberty and adolescence. However, incidences of body dissatisfaction have been recorded in girls as young as 5 years old (Kostanski, Fisher, Gullone, 2004; Kostanski & Gullone, 1999; Pine, 2001). In a review comparing literature on the topic of body image dissatisfaction in pre-adolescent girls, Ricciardelli and McCabe (2001) found that the incidence of girls desiring a thinner body size than their own was between 28% and 55%. (These figures are based on studies conducted outside of South Africa, and at present I could not find statistics regarding body image dissatisfaction for South African pre-adolescents.) These figures however are not meaningful on their own, however, as girls who desire a thinner body size may not necessarily be experiencing body dissatisfaction, but rather may just be conveying the dominant discourse of modern society.

Three girls showed signs of extreme body dissatisfaction, either by directly expressing their concerns, or by relating to the heavier girl in the picture and giving anecdotal evidence of their own. One respondent in particular clearly illustrated the level of body image dissatisfaction experienced. She stated the following when asked which girl she would like to be like:

- “I would say I would like to be Sarah (thinner girl). I think I would be a better person and not a useless person towards people.” (11)

The same respondent stated the following when asked how she felt about her body:

- “I feel like it’s weakening because of all the pain that it’s gone through and now I heard my mother and father are divorcing, so it makes my body feel uncomfortable towards everything. It feels like I hate myself for this, for coming into the world. It feels like it was a mistake.” (11)

In the case of this particular respondent it is clear the extreme body dissatisfaction experienced is not necessarily related to the girl's BMI as she is of average weight for her height and age and not overweight. However, this is the same respondent who indicated that she engaged in dieting by drinking special tea in grade 3. She also mentioned that her parents are getting divorced, which is an indication of disruption in the family unit and negative marital love. The familial environment is also critical to the child's socialisation and eventual self-concept and body esteem (Ogle & Damhorst, 2003). Sinton and Birch (2005) investigated the effect of marital love on the emergence of dieting (which included concerns about being overweight and a desire to be thinner) and found that low marital love was linked with higher emergence of dieting.

This particular respondent clearly communicated a relationship between her parents' decision to divorce and the way she feels about her body. This response was spontaneous to the broad question "How do you feel about your body?" To reiterate, the respondent stated: "...now I heard my mother and father are divorcing, so it makes my body feel uncomfortable towards everything" (11). This statement illustrates the quantitative findings of Sinton and Birch (2005) who found that low marital love was linked with the emergence of dieting. This particular respondent also indicated that she had previously been on a diet and said that this was due to being overweight at age 9. She described herself as being "...a fat child then" (11). This particular child is one incidence of extreme body image dissatisfaction coupled with a disruptive familial context and symptoms of depression in the sample interviewed. Causality or correlation cannot be inferred from this particular study, however it does add more breadth to the findings indicating that marital love and depression will have an influence on a child's body image. This is an area that requires further research.

Another respondent indicated that at present she is most like the heavier girl in the picture. This particular respondent could be classified as thin and expressed the following:

- "Because I am a little big" (3)

This respondent also indicated that she would like to eat less as she feels she eats too much at present. This can be linked back to literature stating that even girls who are of a healthy weight will still strive to be thinner due to societal, familial and peer pressure (Grogan, 2008; Kostanski, Fisher & Gullone, 2004; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001).

Two other girls mentioned that there were aspects of their bodies with which they were not happy, but on the whole they expressed resilience with regard to what others might think. One respondent

stated the following upon asking why she associated herself with the heavier girl (the particular respondent was of average weight and not overweight):

Respondent: *“Because I’m ugly. I always tell that to myself and my friend tells me too, that I’m beautiful and I mustn’t concentrate on when they say I’m ugly.”*

This respondent also indicated that she was being teased for being ‘ugly’. Being fat and being ugly are linked with one another, as she stated that she thinks she is like the heavier girl in the picture although physically, there was no resemblance between the girl in the picture and this participant.

The majority of the girls stated that if they could choose they would be like the thinner girl in the picture, which can be linked with the figure preference task of selecting a thinner body ideal but, as previously discussed, the majority of the girls also stated that body size isn’t necessarily important to them at this stage, strengthening the rhetorical anomalies expressed by the girls. The thinner girl was also selected as the preferred person to be like as she was described as more popular and attractive. One girl, who expressed body image satisfaction, stated that she is most likely more like the heavier girl because:

- “I am not popular, so I am more like her. I can eat what I want and I don’t really get fat, but I am not popular” (9)

This once again illustrates that a simple figure preference task does not conclude that choosing a slimmer figure than one’s own means that the person making the selection strives to attain a similar figure, in this case it is based on what the thinner person is associated with and represents, i.e. popularity. This particular study interviewed 11 girls qualitatively and found that three girls experienced extreme body dissatisfaction, while the remaining girls expressed conflicting instances of body satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It is important to note that although not reporting extreme dissatisfaction with regard to body image, many of the girls still associated negative attributes with the heavier girl and communicated that it is important to prevent oneself from becoming fat, which is associated with negative attributes and requires a person to be pitied and patronised. One may speculate that if these views are already entrenched in pre-adolescence, the likelihood will increase of experiencing body image dissatisfaction when dealing with a changing body in adolescence.

4.8 Conclusion

The first theme dealt with the contradiction between what the participants expressed regarding weight and appearance and what they actually believed to be true. The importance of appearance and weight was downplayed and negated by religious and socially acceptable statements that hold that these factors are not important when evaluating a person. However, throughout the vignette, the thinner girl was mostly perceived as more intelligent, popular, friendlier, tidier, liked by their teacher and more likely to get romantic interest from others, while the fatter girl received negative associations and very few positive associations. The fatter girl was also described as being sad and wanting a 'normal' body, which indicates the true manner in which heavier people are perceived. The girls expressed a superficial empathy that can best be described as pity toward the heavier girl in the vignette. This is also contradictory, because if looks and appearance did not matter, there would be no reason to empathise with the girl. By underplaying the importance of weight and appearance and by holding that the heavier girl has no control over her weight, a patronising smokescreen masks the harsh reality that overweight people are generally met with contempt.

The girls also stated that they would like to be the thinner girl if they could choose as the thinner girl was associated with more positive attributes such as popularity and intelligence. The meaning attached to being thin makes it an aspirational ideal for those who do not conform to the shape and a strong motivation for those who are thin, to stay that way. A pro-active dieting strategy was noted, as all the girls were aware of what dieting meant and entailed, which indicated that they were well aware of what was needed to achieve or maintain a thin body ideal. Some girls reported having already engaged in dieting behaviour, and communicated this as an acceptable and normal approach to attaining a thinner, more acceptable figure.

These findings illustrate that the thin ideal is entrenched in these girls' thinking, and that the importance of weight and appearance is underplayed to deny that people who do not adhere to this thin body ideal are likely to be subjected to the negative consequences it bears. These include teasing and being ascribed negative attributes, based solely on appearance.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

5.1 Introduction

In chapter one of this dissertation, I provided the non-academic and academic rationale for researching the body and dieting concerns of pre-adolescent South African girl children. Chapter two discussed the literature available on the topic in a systematic manner, starting with a brief history of body image research, the dominant theoretical perspectives on body image, and concluding with the empirical findings of previous research into the area. The dearth of research on pre-adolescent body image, particularly in South Africa, led to the study being exploratory in nature. Eleven pre-adolescent girls between the ages of 9 and 12 years old were interviewed by means of a vignette technique. Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of the six salient themes that emerged from the data collection. This will be a consolidated conclusion of the findings in Chapter 4, to provide a coherent summary of the research findings. I will subsequently touch on the limitations of this study and the possibility of future research.

5.2 Summary of findings

Six important themes emerged from the research during the thematic analysis phase. These themes are summarised very briefly to provide an overview of the detailed inferences made in Chapter 4. I hope that these findings will inform future research into the body images of South African girl children, particularly in the South African context.

5.2.1 Downplaying the importance of appearance

The importance of appearance and weight was dismissed by the participants in an almost automatic fashion, as if it were a statement that had been rehearsed. However, although the consensus was reached that a person's appearance was not an important factor in making inferences about that person, the participants still felt that fat people would be happier if they lost weight, and generally attributed negative traits to the fatter girl in the picture. This paradox was evident in the subsequent themes as the participants were not aware that the information they were providing was contradictory. Downplaying the importance of weight and appearance is concluded to be a socially acceptable or polite response that did not concur with the information provided throughout the interview. Some participants also compared the heavier girl in the picture to handicapped people or people with 'abnormal' bodies. These comparisons highlight the paradox that exists between the socially polite response and the actual negative stereotypes held about overweight persons.

5.2.2 Pity parading as empathy

Similar to the negation of the importance of weight and appearance, the participants also stated that overweight persons have no control over their weight. Participants mostly felt that the fatter girl in the picture was born overweight or could not help that she was overweight. The participants also expressed pity toward the heavier girl, an indication that weight does in fact matter. This again highlighted the contradiction that existed between perceived lack of control and what the participants further stated. They felt if the fatter girl lost weight she would be happier, and they also offered her advice on how she could achieve this, something that would not be possible if she had no control over her weight. The expressed pity toward the fatter girl in the picture, masked by polite expressions that negate the harsh reality faced by overweight people, and that could be viewed as a false sense of empathy.

5.2.3 What I see is who you are

Respondents generally assigned more positive personality traits to the thinner girl in the picture throughout the vignette, with the heavier girl receiving the occasional positive trait, and all of the negative traits. The thin girl was described as being more intelligent, more liked by the teacher, more popular, while also being described as a neat person and a leader. The fatter girl was described as being a rough girl, not as popular or clever and being the teacher's favourite because the teacher feels sorry for her, again highlighting the extent to which fatter people are pitied.

5.2.4 Maybe they tease you because you are fat

Teasing was a prominent theme in the data. Participants hesitantly concluded that the fatter girl was most likely being teased because of her weight. This again revealed the manner in which the participants tip-toed around the subject of her being fat. Explicitly stating that someone who is fat would be socially unacceptable and not in line with their conviction that appearance is not important. The girls offered detailed accounts of how the girl in the picture was being teased as well as providing accounts of being teased themselves, or knowing of someone who had been teased. This theme also highlighted that being fat and being 'ugly' were concepts closely related to one another, as the girls often used both the statements to describe the teasing.

5.2.5 A lifelong diet

Dieting awareness was high among the participants, and almost all of the girls interviewed could provide a definition of dieting that included restricted food intake and the inclusion of exercise. Two

girls admitted to having engaged in dieting behaviour, and these accounts included drinking special tea and eating special foods. These participants viewed their dieting behaviour as necessary and acceptable to achieving a thinner ideal. Although the other girls did not admit to being on a diet, their descriptions of what dieting involved seemed to be a normative state of knowing what to eat, what not to eat and how much to eat. Their descriptions were reminiscent of a pro-active strategy to remain thin, as opposed to expressing healthy attitudes. The girls received information about dieting mainly from their mothers and aunts. This is an indication of the pressures placed on women to look a certain way and of how this is passed on to their daughters.

5.2.6 Body concerns

The majority of girls interviewed stated that if they could choose they would be the thinner girl in the picture. The reasons given for this was because she was perceived to be more beautiful and also more popular. One respondent associated more with the fatter girl in the picture although being of normal weight herself. Her reasons for associating with the fatter girl were because she also felt that she was not popular. The meanings attached to being a certain weight provides further insight into the reasons why a thinner ideal is pursued. Body concerns were expressed by the pre-adolescents and in one instance were set in the context of a troubled family life. What is apparent is that the thin ideal is very much present among these pre-adolescent girls.

5.3 Limitations of the study

This particular study was exploratory and aimed at providing a broad indication of the experience of South African pre-adolescent girls with regard to body and dieting concerns. The vignette was semi-structured and allowed the participants to engage with the topic on their terms and to communicate the issues they felt were important. As a result, certain factors previously shown to affect body image satisfaction, such as BMI were not included in the scope of this research. A combination of qualitative and quantitative information can perhaps be utilised for future studies to compare quantitative data such as BMI, weight, and height with the qualitative information gathered.

A vignette with two pictures; one of a thin girl and one of a fatter girl, was used to guide respondents' storytelling and subsequent responses. The pictures showed two completely different girls of different sizes. In future, perhaps using digitally modified pictures of the same person would be optimal, as the only notable difference would then be body size, and other features will become irrelevant. The use of the vignette proved very effective for the age group. Nevertheless, when

having children as participants, one always runs the risk of obtaining information that is perhaps not a complete and accurate representation of the children's' thoughts and behaviour.

Finally, the girls were mainly from the Gauteng area and socio-economic status was not controlled for. The findings are therefore more suggestive than conclusive, and do not serve to be generalisable to the South African pre-adolescent female population, but rather serves as a foundation to build future research on.

5.4 Future research

This particular research presented a number of areas that deserve further academic research. The themes that emerged in this research can be explored in more depth in future research. The superficial notions pertaining to the importance of weight and the lack of control over weight can further be compared to how overweight persons are evaluated. The success of programmes promoting a healthy body image should also look at the extent to which the importance of appearance and weight is internalised, to determine whether messages negating the importance of appearance are in fact internalised or merely used as a euphemism to disguise feelings of contempt toward obese people. The perceived control over weight was a dominant theme in the research, and dedicating research to people's own perceived control over their weight and those of others may lead to valuable findings.

The high levels of dieting awareness indicate that children become aware of this behaviour from a very young age. The extent to which this impacts on overall body image satisfaction over time has already been investigated internationally to some extent, but research into the South African context will prove valuable.

Finally, the present research focused on pre-adolescent girls only, and research into younger age groups will prove insightful. The sample can also be adapted to include more girls from different backgrounds in order to ascertain whether the present findings are relevant to girls from different social classes and urban and rural settings.

5.5 Recommendations

The research conducted provided a glimpse into the world of the pre-adolescent and her body image. The recommendations I provide are broad and further scientific investigation into this area may prove valuable for academic inquiry and those that put these findings into practise.

Internationally, a number of intervention programmes exist, as well as literature in the form of children's books that celebrate unique body characteristics and aims to teach tolerance and respect. Findings from inquiry in this subject area can assist in creating intervention programmes for the South African context. Two findings from the research validate a need for this kind of intervention: the high prevalence of teasing aimed toward children who are overweight, and the high levels of dieting awareness and early onset of dieting. The former may already be addressed in programmes aimed at reducing bullying, however the high levels of dieting awareness may become problematic and may encourage disordered eating in children that may escalate when adolescence is reached (Hill & Pallin, 1998). Childhood obesity is receiving considerable attention worldwide, however if the focus becomes shifted toward dieting practices and not healthy and balanced eating, disordered eating patterns may occur, which may eventually be linked with eating disorders.

An outcome of this research is to provide a workshop with teachers and possibly parents to share some of the findings from this research and to collectively work on solutions on how to create positive body images opposed unhealthy and distorted body images.

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Appendix A



University of Pretoria

Pretoria, 0002

Republic of South Africa

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www.up.ac.za

Faculty Humanities

Department Psychology

20 November 2008

Consent to allow girl child to act as a research participant in the study on the body and dieting concerns of pre-adolescent (9-12 year old) South African girl children.

Your daughter is kindly invited to participate in a research study done by Ms E. Smit as partial fulfilment of the Masters in Research Psychology offered by the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria. The Research Proposal and Ethics Committee have approved this study. If your daughter is willing to participate, you as parent will need to give written permission.

The information provided in this document is provided in order to give you the necessary information so that you can make an informed decision about the participation of your daughter in this study.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to explore the eating and dieting concerns of pre-adolescent (9-12 year old) South African girl children. The study aims to describe how young girls feel about their bodies and to ascertain how these young girls feel about issues regarding eating and dieting.

Methodology for the Study

I will conduct in-depth interviews using a vignette with one girl at a time. The interview will consist of a series of questions related to the topic and the girls will be allowed to express their opinions freely. Vignettes are hypothetical settings created by the researcher, the participants are then asked to describe how they think the characters in the story feel and how they feel about the topic. Pictures of pre-adolescent girls with different body shapes will also be shown to the girls in order to gain insight into their opinions regarding the various types of bodies.

Procedure

If you agree to let your daughter participate in the interview, the following will happen:

- The interview will be conducted in a place most convenient for you and your daughter
- The interview will be tape-recorded, and will take approximately an hour and a half.
- If more information is required, a separate session will be scheduled at a time convenient for you and your daughter.
- 10 minutes will be used in order to debrief your daughter after the interview.

Ethical Committee Approval

The research proposal for this particular study has been submitted to the University of Pretoria Research Proposal and Ethics Committee for approval, as no interviews may be conducted without approval from the committee. The Research Proposal and Ethics Committee have approved this particular study and interviews may commence.

Risks and discomfort if your daughter participates

The research interview will be structured in a way which will ensure that the girls enjoy the interview and that no discomfort is experienced. However, if at any stage the participant is not comfortable with a question, she will not be required to answer that question. She will also be allowed to discontinue the interview at any stage should she feel uncomfortable. No personal information of identification will be revealed, and the research will protect the identities of those involved.

Benefit

There will be no direct benefit from the study. However, by allowing your daughter to participate in the research, knowledge will be gathered about the world of these young girls, and this will allow parents, teachers, and others to better understand the issues among girls of such a young age regarding eating and dieting. By participating in the study, you will be contributing to knowledge.

Limits

Neither I, nor the educational institution will provide financial, legal, or emotional advice or counseling to participants as a part of, or result of, their participation in this study. If you should seek professional guidance, however, I will gladly provide you with the details of the applicable professionals.

Costs and Compensation

The purpose of the research is to complete the master's programme, and as a result there is no financial interest in the outcome of the result. Participants will therefore not be financially compensated for participation.

Confidentiality

The research material will be safely stored in a locked cabinet in a secure building, and once the study is completed, it will be stored electronically in a safe and secure location. I and other authorized personnel will have access to the research material. Information derived from the process that personally identifies you or your daughter will not be released without prior consent of the participant and researcher. If the need arises to divulge any personal information of the participant, assent will first be asked from the child and the legal guardian. Without this consent, no information about the participant's identity or information will be divulged.

Findings

Participants and their parents will be able to access findings as soon as they are available. The results will be disseminated in a word report as well as a journal article(s) for publication. These reports will be made available to participants and their parents.

Informed Consent

Is your daughter willing to participate?

Yes:

No:

If yes, please give legal consent for her participation:

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, procedures, and risks of this study. My signature below indicates that I have read and understand the details and the content of this consent form.

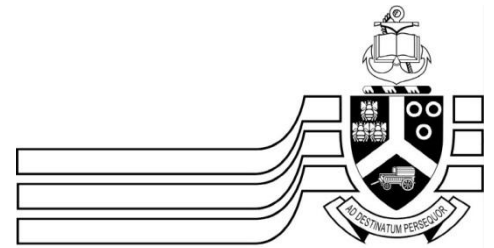
Signature

Date

Contact Details:

For more information with regard to the study and your rights, please contact the principal investigator, Ms E. Smit on 083 520 3902 or elnasmit@gmail.com .

Appendix B



University of Pretoria

Pretoria, 0002

Republic of South Africa

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www.up.ac.za

Faculty Humanities

Department Psychology

17 October 2008

Dear

I am doing a study for the University of Pretoria as part of my degree and I need to interview girls like you, who are between the ages of 9 and 12 years.

The study is about how girls of your age feel about their bodies and dieting.

I am going to show you a few pictures of different girls and then we will have a conversation about it. We will just be chatting, so you don't need to be nervous at all!

Before I can interview you, you must give me permission to do so. The following are things you need to know so that you can decide whether or not you want to have the interview with me:

1. What will happen?

- The interview will be done in a place which is most convenient for you and your parent.
- The interview will be tape-recorded and will take approximately an hour and a half from start to finish.
- If I need more information from you, I will contact you again and arrange another meeting with your permission.
- After we have done the interview, we will use 10 minutes to discuss how you feel after we have done the interview.

2. What if you feel uncomfortable?

The research interview will be structured in such a way to ensure that you enjoy the interview and that no discomfort is experienced. However, if at any stage you are not comfortable with a question, you do not have to answer it. Also, if you don't want to go ahead with the interview anymore, we will stop, and nothing will happen. It is all right if you don't want to.

3. Will other people know what I said?

Everything you tell me will be kept between us and when I write my report, I will not use your name. I will also store all the recordings and notes in a locked cabinet at the University. Your identity will never be revealed without your permission. If I see that there is something that comes out in our interview that needs further attention, I will inform you about it and then I will let your parents know. This way we ensure that you are safe and healthy. I will keep your best interests at heart.

4. What will I do with the information?

I am going to interview ten girls of your age. Once I have all the information, I will write a report that I will use to give to the University as my final assignment. Once again, in this report I will never mention your name - you will remain anonymous.

5. What do I get for participating?

There is no reward for participating nor is there any consequences if you do not participate. I will just supply something to drink when we do the interview. You will however be giving me very valuable information that will be used to help and better understand girls like yourself in the future.

5. Do you have any other questions?

Child's Assent:

If you all your questions are answered and you are willing to be interviewed, please just write your name on this line to show that you are all right with me interviewing you.

Name:

Date:

If you need to contact me at any stage, you can, my number is 083 530 3902.