



PII S0277-5395(96)00076-3

GROWING UP IN THE CULTURE OF SLENDERNESS Girls' Experiences of Body Dissatisfaction

SARAH GROGAN AND NICOLA WAINWRIGHT

Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Elizabeth Gaskell Campus,
Hathersage Road, Manchester M13 0JA, UK

Synopsis — This paper reports two group-interviews of young women aged 8 and 13 years. These young women were dissatisfied with their bodies and described ideal figures that matched the slim adult ideal. The younger girls were not dieting but were involved in helping their parents to diet. Adolescents had avoided "fattening" foods and would be concerned if they put on half a stone in weight. Eating (particularly sweet food) was used as a means of comfort and to relieve boredom by young women in both age groups. Results are similar to those of Nickie Charles and Marion Kerr (1986) who interviewed adult women. It is concluded that children as young as 8 years give accounts of body dissatisfaction that are similar to those of adult women, and that suggest acceptance of the slim adult ideal. Implications are discussed in relation to cultural influences on young women that encourage objectification and criticism of the body. *Copyright © 1996 Elsevier Science Ltd*

Nickie Charles and Marion Kerr (1986) report the results of interviews with women where they discussed attitudes to dieting and satisfaction with their present weight. The results were fascinating and revealed the extent of women's dissatisfaction with their body shape and weight. They concluded that:

What emerges from these comments is a strong dissatisfaction with their body image, a dissatisfaction which was not confined to women who were dieting or were trying to diet but was shared by almost all the women we spoke to. (Charles & Kerr, 1986, p. 541)

Charles and Kerr (1986) suggest that the societal goal of the abnormally thin body is not attainable by most women, except by severe restriction of food intake. The inability of most women to attain this unrealistic goal leaves them feeling guilty and dissatisfied with their body shape and weight. They argue convincingly that, in Western cultures, most women have a contradictory and problematic relationship with their body and with food, and are dissatisfied with their body shape and weight.

Body dissatisfaction in women is widely documented, mostly in the psychology literature. Susie Orbach (1993), in an extensive review of relevant literature argues that there is good evidence that women in Western society are stigmatised for not being slim, and that we internalise this stigma and become dissatisfied with our body shape and weight. She suggests that we are taught to view our bodies from the outside, as if they were commodities, which causes distortion of body image, and a disjuncture from our own bodies, which are objectified and continually monitored for faults. Orbach suggests that a smaller body size for women was being proposed at the same time that women were demanding to be taken more seriously in the workplace.

The shrinking of the American and British woman, or rather the idea that she should shrink, coincides too uncomfortably with changes women have been demanding about their social role for one to regard it as merely coincidence. Body maintenance, body beautiful, exercise and the pursuit of thinness are offered as valued arenas for concern precisely at the moment when

women are trying to break free of such imperatives. (Orbach, 1993, p. 56)

It is generally accepted that pressures on women are qualitatively and quantitatively different from pressures on men. Women are more often the subject of "the gaze" than vice versa. Women are more likely to diet, have cosmetic surgery, and have eating disorders (Davis, 1994). It has recently become fashionable to talk about the objectification of the male body, and the possible effects of this objectification on men's body image. Frank Mort (1988) discusses the "hyper-cultivation" of the male body, encouraging men to look at themselves and each other as possible objects of consumer desire. Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein, and Streigel-Moore (1986) argue that examination of current magazines and other media suggest that bodily concern is strong for men. However, there is still a wide gap in the presentation of the male and female body in mainstream media, and the cultural meanings of the messages associated with the portrayal of men and women. Rowena Chapman (1988) argues that there is still an inequity in cultural images of the male and the female body, showing how the myth of the "new man" who is sensitive, aware, and concerned about his body functions to disempower women by creating the appearance of equity whilst maintaining the old power differentials.

It seems likely that women will be more resistant to cultural pressures to be slim if we grow up with a reasonably positive image of our body and are able to maintain it through adolescence and into adulthood. Body image in preadolescent girls has been largely neglected in the social sciences literature. In one of the few studies in this area, Marika Tiggemann and Barbara Pennington (1990) have produced evidence that Australian girls as young as 9–10 years report body dissatisfaction. In this study, adult undergraduates, adolescents aged 15–16 years, and children aged 9–10 years were presented with sets of age-relevant silhouette drawings ranging from very thin to very heavy. Women in all three age groups rated their current figures as larger than their ideal. They suggest that body dissatisfaction is the normal experience of women from age 9 upwards, and that the imagery surrounding fatness and slimness on television and through other media is very influential in determining children's

beliefs concerning correct and incorrect body size. Andy Hill, Sarah Oliver, and Peter Rogers (1992), in a recent British study, have produced similar findings from body satisfaction questionnaires, and body figure preferences indicated using line drawings of female figures. They conclude that girls from 9 years are dissatisfied with their body shape and size. They argue that children consume adult beliefs, values and prejudices around body shape and size and adopt them as their own.

Although there is a notable lack of research on body satisfaction in children, there has been a lot of interest in body satisfaction in adolescence. Betty Carruth and Dena Goldberg (1990) argue that adolescence is seen as a time where body image concern is at its peak due to physical changes in shape that may move girls away from their goal or ideal. Adolescence is also a time of change, self-consciousness, and identity search (Tiggemann & Pennington, 1990). Studies have reliably shown that young women between 13 and 16 years are dissatisfied with their body shape and size. Researchers working in this area have tended to infer body satisfaction from surveys of dieting and body satisfaction (Bunnell, Cooper, Hertz, & Shenker, 1992; Hill et al., 1992; Toro, Castro, Garcia, Perez, & Cuesta, 1989; Wadden, Brown, Foster, & Linowuaritz, 1991) or from judgements of self in relation to silhouette figures (Tiggemann & Pennington, 1990). It has been suggested that most adolescent girls say that they feel fat and want to lose weight. Data come from British (Hill et al., 1992), United States (Wadden et al., 1991), Australian (Maude, Wertheim, Paxton, Gibbons & Szmukler, 1993), and Spanish (Toro et al., 1989) sources. Thomas Wadden and colleagues (1991) argue that adolescent girls are at odds with their bodies, and report (on the basis of survey questionnaire data) that body concern is one of the most important worries in the lives of teenage girls.

We have been unable to find any study in the published literature where girls and adolescent women have been asked to describe their experiences of (dis)satisfaction with their body shape and size. This seems the most valid way to try to understand how girls and adolescents feel, and incorporates sufficient flexibility to allow investigation of areas of experience that adult researchers may not predict prior to talking with the participants. Our experience of

talking with adult women suggests that many women remember feeling under pressure to be slim from primary school onwards. We wanted to explore the issues around body image and food with young women who could share with us their ongoing experiences, rather than investigating memories of such experiences with adult women. The study that follows reports two interviews; one with a group of 8-year-olds, and one with a group of 13-year-olds. It gives some interesting insights into these young women's experiences and beliefs about their bodies, dieting, exercise, and food.

METHOD

Participants

The interviews were part of a larger project involving young women's body image and body (dis)satisfaction. Four 8-year-old and four 13-year-old girls were selected from one state primary and one state secondary school in Sheffield where the second author had been a pupil herself. Participants were chosen on a volunteer basis. All were of average build for their height, were White, and from working- and middle-class backgrounds.

Materials

A set of themes was produced to be used as an interview guide. These covered body image issues such as weight, appearance, and food. Pictures of food were cut out of magazines to give the children something concrete to focus on. A cassette recorder with a directional microphone was used to record the interviews.

Procedure

Children were interviewed in two groups; one for each age. Group (rather than individual) interviews were run because pilot work had suggested that girls were more likely to talk freely in a group than alone. The interviews took place in the school library and were conducted by the second author, a 21-year old, White, woman who was a university student at the time, and who was an ex-student at the school. Children were first engaged in semiformal chat to try to make them feel at ease. When they seemed relaxed, the cassette recorder was turned on and the interview started. The interview was unstructured to add flexibility and

centred on ideas about body-shape, weight, and diet. Interviews lasted about 30 minutes and were closed when the conversation "dried up" naturally. Children were assured of anonymity and all gave permission for the conversation to be recorded prior to the interview taking place. Their permission was given for material to be used after the interview and the resulting data was fed back to them by the second author once analysis had taken place.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The resulting data offer an insight into the way that these young women experience their bodies, and their body shape ideals. Transcripts were analysed within a Grounded Theory framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A number of interrelated themes emerged from each group which will be discussed in turn. The four participants in the 8-year-old group will be identified by the letters A–D, and the four 13-year-olds by the numbers 1–4.

The ideal body

The 8-year-olds agreed that they wanted to be thin; both now and when they grew up. When asked whether they worried about how they looked they said that they worried about getting fat:

Interviewer: What do you worry about then?

A: Being fat mostly.

B: Being fat.

When they were asked how they would like to look when they were older they were quite clear that they wanted to be thin:

Interviewer: How would you like your body to look when you are older?

All: Thin.

C: Not fat. Really thin.

B: Not really thin. Like how thin I am now.

D: I would like to keep thin like I am now.

This contrasted with the 13-year-olds who said that they wanted to be of average size; not too thin or too fat:

3: Not too fat.

4: Not too thin.

2: Normal.

They expressed a dislike for the body shape of models in magazines because they thought they were too thin:

- 1: They look horrible. They're ugly half the time.
 2: Yeah they are.
 1: I think they do sometimes look too thin, they look anorexic.

However, they were envious of those of their friends who were skinny (like the models) and who ate "fattening" foods such as chocolate and did not put on weight. They shared stories about skinny people they knew who could eat anything they liked and how they envied them:

- 3: Well, my friend used to come round all the time but she's a right fussy eater and she's right skinny but she eats a right lot of chocolate bars and everything.
 2: I hate it when really skinny people say "Oh, I'm fat." They just do it to annoy you.

All 8-year-olds cited members of the entertainers "The Gladiators" as role models, although they said that they did not want to get too muscled. Interestingly, having muscle was seen as attractive to men, and thus to be avoided because it would lead to an increase in male attention. For instance, when asked whether they would like a lot of muscle like Jet (woman Gladiator):

- All: No.
 A: No, cos men'd be all around you.
 Interviewer: Do you think men like women with muscles?
 B: Yeah.
 C: Yeah.
 A: Yeah, but I would like to be like Jet though.
 C: Yes, but I wouldn't want muscles.

Similarly, the 13-year-olds expressed a dislike for muscles, which they saw as inappropriate for women because they made women look too masculine:

- 4: I don't like women body builders cos they're right.
 1: Fat and uhhh.

- 2: It's alright for them to have a few muscles but not like.
 4: Be like a man.
 2: Just looks totally.
 1: Out of shape.

Both groups of young women presented conventional Western societal ideals of what constitutes an attractive and acceptable body shape and size. None of them wished to be fatter. The eight-year-olds expressed the desire to be thin in the present and the future. None wanted muscles because they were seen as "masculine." These findings support Hill et al.'s (1992) suggestion that girls of these ages have already internalised adult's ideals of slowness. The 13-year-olds presented some contradictory ideas. They said that skinny models were unattractive, but expressed envy for their skinny friends who could eat fattening foods without gaining weight.

Body dis(satisfaction)

When asked about their satisfaction with their present body shape, two of the 8-year-old girls said that they felt thin (and were satisfied with their weight) and two felt fat (and were dissatisfied). Participants A and C felt fat. When asked what they would change about their bodies both girls said they would want to lose weight:

- Interviewer: Is there anything you like to do to change your body shape?
 C: Lose weight.
 Interviewer: Would you like to lose weight?
 C: Yeah.
 A: Lose weight.
 C: You're thin enough.
 A: I'm fat.
 C: Look at your legs.
 A: They're fat.

The 13-year-old girls were dissatisfied with their "stomachs," which were perceived to be too fat:

- 1: I'd maybe change my tummy.
 3: Yeah, I'd like to be a bit thinner.
 4: Yeah, just got a bit of a bulge on my tummy.

The dissatisfaction reported by these young women was similar in kind to that reported by

the adult women in the Nickie Charles and Marion Kerr (1986) study. Two of the 8-year-olds felt that they were fat and needed to lose weight. Three of the 13-year-olds were dissatisfied with their "stomachs," thinking they were too fat, and none could think of any part of their body that was satisfactory.

This dissatisfaction with body shape and size is similar to that documented in adult women. Girls from age 8 showed concern with their body shape and size. These findings support quantitative research by Marika Tiggemann and Barbara Pennington (1990) on Australian girls and Andy Hill and colleagues (1992) on British girls, showing that body dissatisfaction in young women may start as young as 8 years. These results provide direct evidence that these young women were dissatisfied with their body shape and size, rather than inferring dissatisfaction from the results of comparison of silhouette figures representing self with those representing ideal, or from results of body esteem/satisfaction questionnaires (as in the Australian and British studies cited above).

Dieting and exercise to change body shape and size

The 8-year-olds were clear about the concept of "dieting." They knew what it meant and why people did it. They saw dieting as a means to losing weight; something that people did to look better rather than to be healthier:

Interviewer: Do you know what it means to be on a diet?

C: You have to stop eating.

A: Stop eating a lot so you don't get fat.

Interviewer: Do they go on diets to feel better then or because they want to look better?

B: Look better.

A: Be thinner.

However, dieting to lose weight was seen as something that adults (and not children) did. When asked about dieting, they described it as something that their parents (or other family members) did. None of them had dieted themselves. Two of the girls described the ways in which they were helping their parents to keep to their reducing diets:

C: I put a sign on my mum's fridge and it said "Stop, don't open the fridge mummy."

Interviewer: Are you trying to help your mummy to diet then?

C: Yeah, she keeps on eating biscuits, chocolate biscuits.

B: I put a sticker on my dad's bedroom to remind him not to open the fridge because he is on a diet.

Even though two of them expressed dissatisfaction with their size, none of them had tried to change their body shape through diet. One girl said she was on a diet (for health reasons) and this was greeted with surprise by the others:

C: A little girl like you and you're on a diet!

This suggests that although these children may have internalised adult ideas of acceptable body size, they had not yet adopted the adult coping mechanism of dieting described by Charles and Kerr (1986) and Orbach (1993). They did not consider that changing their eating patterns was a viable way to change their body shape, although it was seen as a reasonable way for adults to try to change their shape. The underlying idea that wanting to change shape was a reasonable goal was accepted by all the girls, with two of them giving examples of how they were helping the adults in their lives to achieve this goal, suggesting that they had internalised the idea that slimness was "good" as suggested by Marika Tiggemann and Barbara Pennington (1990).

The 13-year-olds reported occasional avoidance of particular foods to try to lose weight but stressed that they were not "seriously" dieting and had not been able to keep to any strict regime:

Interviewer: Have any of you ever tried dieting?

2: Yeah, once but . . .

3: Not seriously dieting.

2: Not the dieting really the cutting out foods.

1: Cutting out chocolates.

2: Like cutting out fatty foods and that. A couple of tries but it worked for about a day (laughs). Just trying to lose some.

3: Yeah.

In general, dieting was viewed negatively by these young women as representing too "serious" an attempt to change body shape.

However, although they did not identify what they were doing (avoiding fattening foods) as "dieting," their behaviour closely matches that described as dieting by Charles and Kerr's (1986) adult respondents. For instance, one of their adult respondents says, "If I find I have put on a little bit of weight I'd probably go through the next couple of weeks cutting out cakes and sweets and having fruit instead" (Charles & Kerr, 1986, p. 549). This is very similar to the quote from the 13-year-olds above, and suggests that they are exercising self-denial in relation to food in a similar way to adult women.

The 13-year-olds were keen to show that they were not "obsessive" about their eating, and wanted to distance themselves from women with problematic relationships with food. The word "anorexic" was used disparagingly to describe how models look. There was a general consensus that exercise, rather than restriction of food intake, was to be preferred as a means for controlling weight:

- 1: I prefer exercise rather than diet. Just want exercise so you don't get fat.
 3: Yeah.
 2: Yeah.

Eating sweets and chocolates was seen as an activity that led to feeling "fat" directly afterwards:

- Interviewer: How do you feel afterwards, does it make you feel . . .
 1: Fat.
 3: Yeah, you do. Sometimes when you've eaten a right lot it makes you feel sick and then you wish you hadn't eaten it.
 4: And then you'll have a big bulge in the morning.

Again, there are similarities to Charles and Kerr's (1986) adult respondents who reported feeling fat and guilty after eating food that they thought they should deny themselves. For instance, one woman said that her partner "brought in two Mars bars the other day and I thought that one is going to be mine in a minute and sure enough it was. I felt awful after I'd eaten it. I felt a right pig" (Charles & Kerr, 1986, p. 563).

When asked about whether they noticed their weight, two of the four young women

said that they were not concerned with their weight and did not bother to weigh themselves. Participants 1 and 2 did weigh themselves.

Interviewer: Do you weigh yourselves?

- 1: Yeah, I do.
 2: Sometimes.

1: For the past month I've been the same weight every time. I just normally weigh myself every time I go into the bath just to see.

There was a consensus that putting on half a stone in weight would be too much and that they would then try to lose it again:

- 1: It would bother me if it was half a stone.
 2: I'd try and get it off.

This "magic" figure of half a stone was mentioned by some of the adult women interviewed by Charles and Kerr (1986) who believed that if they were half a stone lighter they would be happy with their weight and their bodies.

The interview data presented here suggest that ideas around body shape and size may change as children become older. Although two of the 8-year-olds thought they were too fat, they had not tried to restrict their food intake to try to remedy this. They saw dieting as an activity that was appropriate for adults but not for children. They did not report actively trying to lose weight. The adolescents, three of whom expressed body dissatisfaction, said that they used exercise to stop them getting fat rather than dieting. However, they also said that they avoided fatty foods and related this directly to the effects of such foods on body shape and weight (rather than health). Eating such foods was said to result in "feeling fat." Although only two young women said that they weighed themselves, all agreed that putting on half a stone was a problem that would be rectified by trying to lose the weight again. These experiences are similar to those of the adults interviewed by Charles and Kerr (1986). What is of particular concern is that these 13-year-olds are of an age when they could be expected to put on at least half a stone when they go through puberty. If they see this as a problem they might exercise, or they might restrict their food intake. Either strategy could lead to problems if engaged in to excess (Carruth & Goldberg, 1990).

Food as comfort

Food played a complex role in these girls' lives. Young women in both age groups described reasons for eating that were close to adult women's experiences described in the Charles and Kerr (1986) paper. They described eating for reasons other than hunger. Unhappiness and situations where they were bored lead them to resort to food as a comfort. Eating to relieve boredom or unhappiness was described by the 8-year-olds:

- A: I eat when I'm sad.
 B: I eat when I'm bored.

The 13-year-olds described the same scenario:

- 2: I eat chocolate when I'm depressed.
 1: I eat loads when I'm bored.
 3: If there isn't ought on telly you eat a right load.

The 13-year-olds said that food choice (when eating because of boredom) was determined by the amount of effort required in preparation. "Healthy" food was less likely to be eaten at these times because it was thought that it took longer to prepare:

- Interviewer: What sort of foods do you eat when you're bored?
 3: Anything.
 2: Biscuits.
 1: You won't make anything healthy when you're bored cos its so much trouble.

Charles and Kerr (1986) have argued that food, particularly sweet food, is used to reward and comfort children and as a substitute for attention. They argue that these practices teach children to regard food as a means of comfort and to relieve boredom. Charles and Kerr (1986) and Orbach (1993) argue that the association between food and comfort that women learn in childhood directly contradicts adult women's need to deny themselves food to remain slim and therefore sexually desirable. This contradiction can lead to an almost obsessive relationship with food, and often a vicious circle where food is used to reduce stress, which leads to weight gain that causes social censure that increases stress. It is a matter of concern that the 8- and 13-year-olds inter-

viewed here were already using food as a source of comfort.

Limitations of the study

The young women we interviewed were all White and working- or middle-class. This was because we wanted to maximise explanation through understanding by picking girls who were as much like us as possible. We shared with these girls the experience of being White women from similar backgrounds, educated in similar schools (in the second author's case, in the same school). We found that these shared experiences helped in our interpretation of the data. However, we recognise that these findings may not be relevant to young Black women, or those in other social classes. Wardle, Bindra, Fairclough, and Westcombe (1993), in a review of relevant studies, show that fewer Black and Asian girls want to lose weight than White girls, suggesting that there are important cultural differences in body shape ideals. Further work could involve interviews with Black women to investigate this.

Implications of the findings

These findings suggest that these young women have learned about the acceptability of the slim body in Western society (and the unacceptability of the body that does not fit the slim ideal). By the age of 8 these girls knew about dieting as a means of trying to attain this goal, although they did not use this strategy themselves. The 13-year-olds reported denying themselves "fattening" foods and felt "fat" when they did eat them, in line with accounts from adult women. What struck us most reading the transcripts was the similarity between the accounts given by these 8- and 13-year-olds, and those of the adults in the Charles and Kerr (1986) study. The accounts presented here add to the existing body of knowledge by showing that girls as young as 8 years old report dissatisfaction with their body weight and shape and show a preference for a socially acceptably slim body. Charles and Kerr (1986) conclude that adult women have a problematic relationship with food and body image. Our findings suggest that this problematic relationship may start early in women's lives, as early as 8 years of age.

These findings have important implications for the role of body image in women's lives. Susie Orbach has argued that we (as women) are taught to view our bodies as commodities from an early age, continually monitoring them for faults, which causes an objectification of our own bodies. The young women we interviewed here presented accounts that suggested that they objectified and criticised their bodies. Their accounts provide support for suggestions that women from primary-school age onwards are sensitive to cultural pressures to conform to a limited range of acceptable body shapes. Wendy Chapkis (1986) argues that the cultural idealisation of a limited range of body shapes is a central feature of women's oppression. She shows how the global culture machine makes a Western model of beauty mandatory for women all over the world. She notes how women suffer when our bodies do not conform to the limited range of acceptable shapes and sizes. She presents a solution to oppression by the beauty system that involves resistance and a refusal to comply with the unrealistic norms propagated by the global culture machine. Her work recognises cultural pressures on women to conform to an ideal that has been imposed on us. Adult women can make an active choice to accept or reject current concepts of body image, in the knowledge that rejection of the norms will mean non-acceptance by dominant cultural groups. Refusal to accept the dominant images of feminine beauty is becoming more prevalent. Many feminists have rejected dominant images of beauty, showing that even in a context of oppression there are possibilities for action (Chapkis, 1986; Wolf, 1991). The advent of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance in the United States, and the "Anti-Dieting" lobby in the United Kingdom has brought the issue of antifat prejudice into the cultural mainstream. Even popular women's magazines are starting to carry stories about the attractions of women who do not conform to the cultural ideal and who are happy to be fat (*Marie Claire*, December 1995, "Why I Adore Large Women," pp. 43–46); and about thin women who are unhappy with the way they look (*New Woman*, December 1995, "I'm Tall, Skinny, Blonde, and I Hate It," p. 81); although the messages in these articles are somewhat contradicted by the photographs of skinny models that surround them.

Adolescent women and girls may find it particularly difficult to challenge dominant cultural representations of femininity at a time when they are still learning about what it means to be a woman in society, and when they are experiencing changes in body shape and size as they move into womanhood. Magazines aimed at girls and young women tend to present traditional slim images of attractiveness. Eileen Guillen and Susan Barr (1994) investigated body image in *Seventeen Magazine* (the best friend of high school girls in the United States) between 1970 and 1990 and concluded that the magazine contributes to the current cultural milieu in which thinness is expected of women, be they adults or adolescents. These images have powerful effects on their readers, serving to foster and maintain a "cult of femininity," supplying definitions of what it means to be a woman (Ferguson, 1985). It is a matter of concern that the images presented in teen-magazines present such a restricted range of models for young women. If women's body image can be bolstered by alternative sources of information, they may be more resilient against influences such as teen magazines, because young women who grow up with a positive body image are less likely to be affected by cultural messages (Orbach, 1993).

Susan Bordo (1993) is pessimistic about the possibilities of change, arguing that women are embedded in the culture that oppresses them, and cannot help but collude in it. We think that this view is overpessimistic. It devalues the efforts of the large number of women who manage to resist the system and forge their own alternative positive body images, and the potential for these women to become positive role models for girls and adolescent women. In the public sphere, Della Grace, Roseanne Barr, Jo Brand, Dawn French, and many others have shown how alternative images of beauty can be brought into mainstream culture to challenge and subvert the beauty system. These women present positive role models for women, presenting them with additional choices. The accounts of the young women here suggested that these role models are not so influential on girls and young women as younger conventionally slim models such as Jet the Gladiator (although even she was seen as inappropriately muscular). Media aimed at girls and adolescent women abound with thin role models but lack positive images of young women who are not

conventionally attractive. Children's television presenters are uniformly thin. Television soaps such as "Neighbours," "Home and Away," "Biker Grove," "Heartbreak High," "Brookside," and "Eastenders," which are watched by large numbers of British young women, all lack positive images of young women who do not conform to the stereotypically slim ideal. The new British soap "Hollyoaks" is typical in its choice of thin, conventionally attractive actresses to play the lead roles. Increased exposure in the media of positive images of strong young women who challenge accepted notions of beauty may encourage young women to be more happy about (and less vigilant over) their bodies. Clearly, this would require a cultural shift in the social construction of beauty. A replication of this study in (say) 10 years time may then produce very different results.

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