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Teenage Life in the Fat Lane

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Teenage Life in the Fat Lane

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Abstract

Young adult fiction may not portray obese characters accurately. Research questions used to explore this issue focused on how obese characters were portrayed in young adult fiction. One set of questions asked whether characters in the books in this study will suffer from ridicule and peer rejection. A second set of questions asked whether any the books in this study will suggest that losing weight will ensure personal happiness. A third set of questions asked whether any of young adult fiction books in this study will portray obesity in a negative manner. After compiling the information, the researcher found that young adult literature portrays obese characters in such a negative manner. The researcher also found obese characters were not treated the same way as a non-obese character. The researcher also found that many of the obese characters were either teased or bullied in regards to their weight. The researcher also found that physical characteristics were portrayed in a negative manner. It seems that people work so hard on creating equal right for others and not allowing discrimination; that people would work hard to treat obese people in the same way.

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Kristi Shreffler

Chapter 1

Introduction

“I’m like, SO fat...why can’t I look like Heather?”

“Ewww, I can’t eat THAT. Look at all that GREASE...Wanna go get a Frappuccino?”

“I’m being really good today: I haven’t eaten a single calorie.”

“No, I’m not eating dinner, Dad; gotta make weight. I’ll be at the gym, probably till you’re in bed.” (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005, p xi).

These are things heard from teenagers in the world today. “Our society is full of pressures that promote obesity but reward thinness.” (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005, p xi).

Body image involves our perception, imagination, emotions, and physical sensations of and about our bodies. It’s not static— but ever changing; sensitive to changes in mood, environment, and physical experience. It is not based on fact. It is psychological in nature, and much more influenced by self-esteem than by actual physical attractiveness as judged by others. It is not inborn, but learned. This learning occurs in the family and among peers, but these only reinforce what is learned and expected culturally. (*Improving Body Image*, 1999, http://www.psychotherapist.org/Index_archives_bodyimage.htm).

Since one source of our sense of image comes from what we read, librarians need to be aware of the portrayal of body image in library materials, including fiction. It is important that fictional works portray issues such as body image in accurate terms.

(Bekkedal, 1973, p.109) This research will show that young adult fiction may not portray

obese characters accurately.

Body Image

In regards to body image, girls are overly concerned about weight and body shape. They strive for the perfect body and judge themselves by their looks, appearance, and above all thinness. Boys don't escape body image issues either. They are concerned with the size and strength of their body. Boys live in a culture that showcases males as glamorous macho figures who have to be tough, build muscles and sculpt their bodies—if they want to fit in. They think they have to be a *real* man, but many admit being confused as to what that means or what's expected of them. This confusion can make it harder than ever to feel good about themselves. (*Body Image*, 1998, http://www.edreferral.com/body_image.htm#what%20is%20body%20image). One of the major concerns of teenagers is being overweight.

Obesity

Obesity is a growing concern for all Americans. Obesity is a condition characterized by excessive bodily fat. (Merriam-Webster, 2005). The statistics of overweight teenagers today are growing at an unbelievable rate. Dianne Neumark-Sztainer (2005) shows the growing concerns of teenagers; the prevalence of obesity in teenagers has tripled over the past 20 years. Currently 15% of teenage girls and boys are overweight.

The efforts to control weight loss lead to more serious problems. One-half of teenage girls and one-fourth of teenage boys are dissatisfied with their bodies. Over one-half of teenage girls and nearly one-third of teenage boys using unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes vomiting and taking

laxatives. Dieting has been found to lead to weight gain, and not to weight loss, in teenagers. Girls who diet frequently are 12 times as likely to binge eat as girls who don't diet, and boys who diet frequently are at a 7 times greater risk for binge eating.

Eating Disorders

This leads to, approximately 1 out of 200 adolescent girls and young women develop anorexia nervosa. The prevalence of bulimia nervosa is 1-3% among adolescent girls and young women. Thus out of 100 females, 1-3 will develop bulimia nervosa. Although eating disorders are more common among girls than boys, a significant number of teenage boys develop serious eating disorders, and many more engage in harmful weight-loss or muscle-gain behaviors. (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005, p). Teenagers today feel many things, especially in a society promoting thinness.

An eating disorder is a complex illness. Most medical experts say that although food and body image are the most noticeable features of an eating disorder, the illness is really about a person's deep psychological, social, or emotional conflicts as well as a person's genetic makeup. (Bjorklund, 2006, pg 10). Nearly seven million girls and young women in the United States have an eating disorder. A growing number of American boys and men--approximately one million--also develop eating disorders. (Bjorklund, 2006, pgs10-11).

There are several types of eating disorders, but the three most common are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder. All of these are associated with an unhealthy diet and with physical exercise. (Bjorklund, 2006, pg 14).

Anorexia nervosa is when the person actually ignores her appetite, rather than trying to lose it. The person who suffers from anorexia is hungry all the time, but severely limits what she eats and drinks. People with anorexia are terrified to gain weight

and eat very little. People with anorexia do not get enough nutrients to keep their bodies healthy. (Bjorklund, 2006, pg 14).

Bulimia nervosa is a disease of overeating combined with emotional, social, physical, or mental stress. People who suffer from the disease binge and eat huge amounts of food during a short period of time. Then they purge to rid their bodies of the food. Many times people with bulimia end their bouts of overeating by forcing themselves to vomit. Others will use drugs such as laxatives, diuretics, and diet pills. Often they do enormous injury to their bodies, including stomach and intestinal pain. (Bjorklund, 2006, pg 19).

Binge-eating disorder (also called compulsive overeating disorder) is like bulimia, except that those who suffer from the disease do not try to purge their food. People with the disease rapidly consume excessive amounts of food in a short period, often in secret. Most binge-eaters are overweight. Many are obese. This type of disorder makes it difficult for their bodies to convert food into energy. They often develop serious health problems. (Bjorklund, 2006, pgs 21-23).

Here is an example of a teenage girl obsessed with being thin:

Jamie, age seventeen, a beautiful, bright girl, weighing 145 pounds, hated her body, her hips, and her stomach. Always wanting to lose a few pounds, she had begun purging her food six months ago.

“Every night that I throw-up I can’t help but be afraid that my heart might stop or something terrible might happen. I just hope I can stop this throwing up before it kills me...I feel crazy when I have a panic attack.

Each time I have incredible binge, I immediately take laxatives to rid

myself of all that forbidden food.”

She fasted all day, and when she got home from school weighed herself. When the scale showed no weight lost, Jamie went into the kitchen and began to binge. She could eat two bowls of cereal, a large bag of animal cookies, a quart of ice cream, and two-thirds of a frozen cheesecake. She really needed to lose five pounds. Eating rapidly, stuffing more and more food in her mouth, she felt ashamed; she had to purge. It became a pattern in which she'd fast most of the day, drinking only diet coke, and then go on binges in afternoon and evening, eating up to 5,000 calories, then vomiting and taking laxatives to purge herself of the horrible food and guilt.

On weekends, sometimes Jamie would binge 10 times a day. Her voice became raspy, her glands swollen, her cheeks pouched out, chipmunk-like. Her stomach, throat and nasal passages all burned from the constant vomiting. She worried about damage done to intestines by laxative abuse. She was tired of always being dehydrated, exhausted--tired of being chained to bathroom, sneaking in and out--tired of craving foods she knew she'd just throw up again if she ate. She spent all her money on food, laxatives, and diet pills. Her bingeing and purging interfered with all areas of her life. Yet she felt relaxed and comforted when she binged for a while. Then she'd feel ashamed and would wish she hadn't eaten so much. No way she could stop, she feared that only with laxatives and vomiting could a ballooning of her weight be prevented. (Berg, 2004, pgs.170-

171).

Media Influence

Most of our cues about what we should look like come from the media, our parents, and our peers. A constant obsession with weight, the size of our bodies and longing for a different shape or size can be painful. The media plays a big part (*Body Image*, 1998, http://www.edreferral.com/body_image.htm #what%20is%20body%20image). As a result, many teenage girls intensely dislike their bodies and can tell you down to the minutest detail what's wrong with them. Most teens watch an average of 22 hours of television a week and are deluged with images of fat-free bodies in the pages of health, fashion and teen magazines (*Body Image*, 1998, http://www.edreferral.com/body_image.htm #what%20is%20body%20image). Surrounded by thin models and TV celebrities, teenage girls are taught to achieve an impossible goal. The standard is impossible to achieve. A female should look like, and have the same dimensions as Barbie, and a male should look like Arnold Schwarzenegger. Buff Baywatch lifeguards, the well-toned abs of any cast member of Melrose Place or Friends, and music-video queens don't help. Take a look at the 10 most popular magazines on the newspaper racks. The women and men on the covers represent about .03 percent of the population (*Body Image*, 1998, http://www.edreferral.com/body_image.htm #what%20is%20body%20image). The other 99.97% don't have a chance to compete, much less measure up. The images of men and women in ads today do not promote self esteem or positive self image. They're intended to sell products. In the U.S. billions of dollars are spent by consumers who pursue the perfect body. The message *thin*

is in is sold thousands of times a day through TV, movies, magazines, billboards, newspapers and songs. Advertising conveys the message "You're not O.K. Here's what you need to do to fix what's wrong." Girls and boys believe it and react to it. In a 1997 Body Image survey, both girls and boys reported that "very thin or muscular models" made them feel insecure about themselves. (*Body Image*, 1998, http://www.edreferral.com/body_image.htm#what%20is%20body%20image).

Normal Body Weight

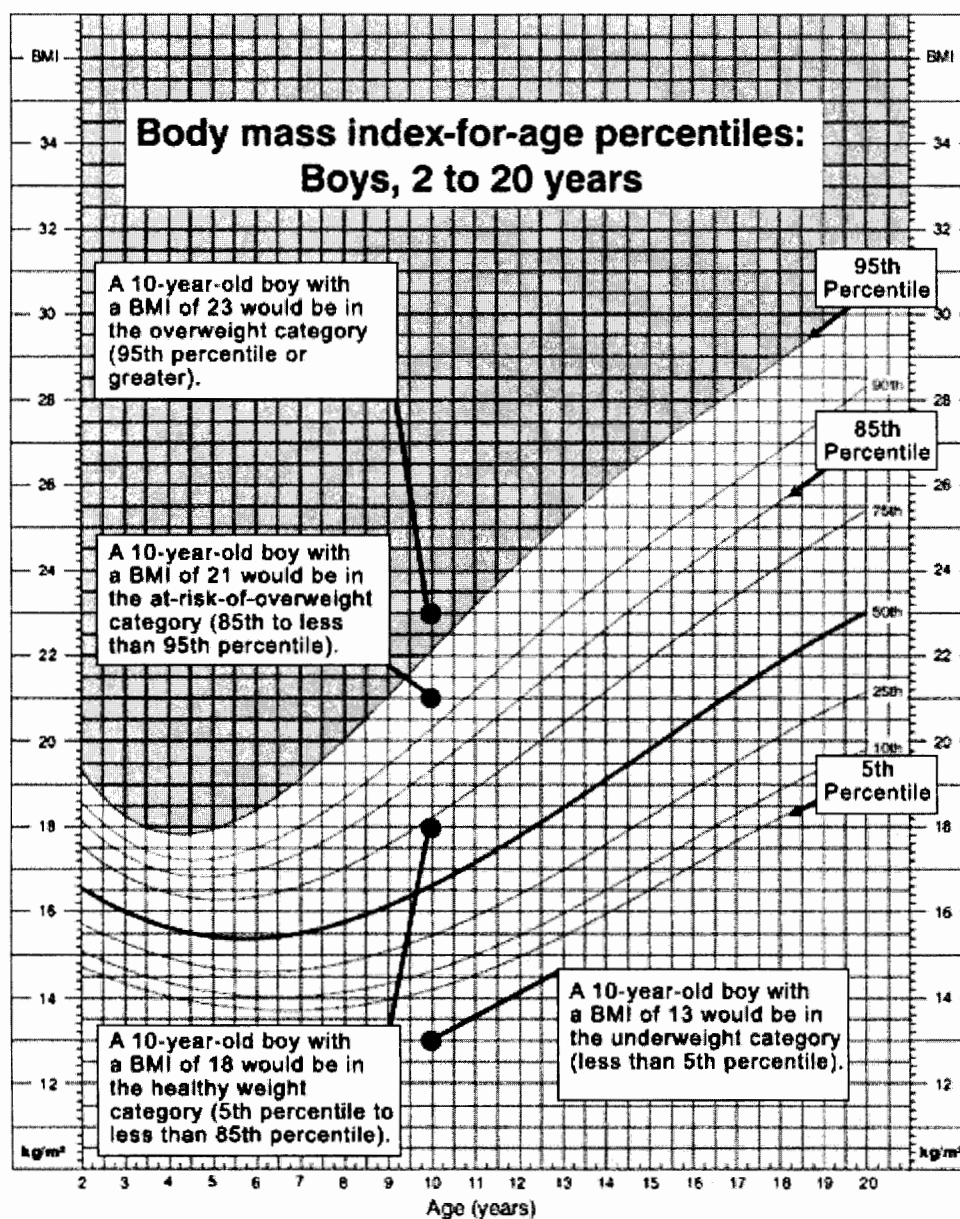
Media messages ignore normal body variations. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the average U.S. woman is 5' 3.7" (162 centimeters) tall and weighs 152 pounds (69 kilograms). This corresponds to a Body Mass Index of 26.3 kilograms/meters², which is slightly less than the average man's. (*WONDER QUEST*, 2002, <http://www.wonderquest.com/size-women-us.html>, p.1). Where are these girls on the TV shows? The average U.S. male stands 5' 9.1" tall and weighs 180 pounds, with a Body Mass Index of 26.5 kg/m². (*WONDER QUEST*, 2002, <http://www.wonderquest.com/size-women-us.html>, p 1). Teenagers today want the perfect body in an imperfect world.

According to the CDC, BMI (body mass index) is used as a screening tool to identify possible weight problems for children and teens. BMI is used to screen for overweight, at risk of overweight, or underweight. However, the BMI is not a diagnostic tool. (CDC, 2007, http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/childrens_BMI/about_childrens_BMI.htm, p.2) The BMI-for-age-percentile is used to interpret the BMI number because BMI is both age-and-sex-specific for children and teens (CDC, 2007,

http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/childrens_BMI/about_childrens_BMI.htm, p.2)

These criteria are different for children and teens because they are based on age and sex for two reasons: the amount of body fat changes with age and the amount of body fat differs between girls and boys. The following example shows how the information is interpreted for a ten-year-old boy (CDC, 2007,

http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/childrens_BMI/about_childrens_BMI.htm, p.3) :



Teenagers today want the perfect body in an imperfect world, where obesity is not uncommon.

Contemporary Young Adult Fiction

Young adult fiction reinforces student perceptions of the world in which they live. Contemporary realism, also known as the teen problem novel emerged in the 1960's. Although not necessarily a new style of writing, novels written in the late 1960s and 1970s offered credibility to young adult literature by tackling serious issues (Nilsen, 1994, p. 30). As contemporary realism developed, it reflected the growing media culture in which personal issues were televised and authors began to stretch beyond genre boundaries to capture the young adult audience (Nilsen, p. 31-2). Today's young adult fiction does not hesitate to deal with important and controversial issues such as those surrounding body image.

Problem Statement

Young adult fiction may not portray obese characters accurately.

Purpose Statements

The purpose of this paper was to investigate how contemporary young adult fiction portrays obese characters.

Hypotheses

1. None of the characters in the books in this study will suffer from ridicule and peer rejection.
2. None of the books in this study will suggest that losing weight will ensure personal happiness.
3. None of the young adult fiction books in this study will portray obesity in a

negative manner.

Assumptions

In this study the researcher can assume that stereotypes exist in our culture regarding obesity. These stereotypes also encourage negative perceptions of obesity. The researcher can also assume that the characterizations of obese persons in the literature studied will use established criteria that are accepted and used to evaluate the characters. The researcher can also assume that collections used in this research study are representative collections that have been compiled by professional teacher librarians.

Limitations

This study is limited to young adult fiction books that focus on obesity as the problem facing the main character in the book. The number of books was limited by the copyright dates from 1999 to the present.

Definitions

Amenorrhea- abnormal absence or suppression of menses. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005-2006, <http://www.m-w.com>).

Anorexia Nervosa- a serious disorder in eating behavior primarily of young women in their teens and early twenties that is characterized especially by a pathological fear of weight gain leading to faulty eating patterns, malnutrition, and usually excessive weight loss. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005-2006, <http://www.m-w.com>).

Binge- to go on a binge; *especially* : to go on an eating binge (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005-2006, <http://www.m-w.com>).

Bulimia - a serious eating disorder that occurs chiefly in females, is characterized by compulsive overeating usually followed by self-induced vomiting or laxative or

diuretic abuse, and is often accompanied by guilt and depression. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005-2006, <http://www.m-w.com>).

Body Mass Index (BMI) – is a number calculated from a child’s weight and height. BMI is a reliable indicator of body fatness for most children and teens (CDC, 2007, http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/childrens_BMI/about_childrens_BMI.htm, p.1)

Diet- the kind and amount of food prescribed for a person or animal for a special reason. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005-2006, <http://www.m-w.com>).

Fast- to abstain from food (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005-2006, <http://www.m-w.com>).

Obesity- a condition characterized by excessive bodily fat (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005-2006, <http://www.m-w.com>).

Overweight- weight over and above what is required or allowed (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2005-2006, <http://www.m-w.com>).

Significance

It is the hope of the author to make the reader aware of portrayals of obese characters in young adult fiction. These portrayals need to reflect accurately obese teenagers and what they face in their physical, intellectual, emotional, behavioral, and social lives. It is important that obese characters receive fair treatment. Equally important is that all readers do not find in their reading portrayals of obese characters that merely reinforce stereotypical patterns. Teachers and librarians must provide a collection of books that present a balanced discussion of issues so that all young readers become more understanding and appreciative of other’s differences.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

This research paper will explore whether young adult chapter books may or may not portray obese characters accurately. In an attempt to better understand young adults eating issues and obesity, three areas of related research were or are examined: the effects of body image on the young adult, the growing concerns of eating disorders in young adults and the negative effects the media has on the young adult's self perception.

The Effects of Body Image on the Young Adult

Smeets, Ingleby, Hoek, Hans and Panhuysen (1999) explored the issue of body size perception, comparing females with anorexia nervosa with controls (p. 467). In the study the participants were 30 female freshman who met the criteria for anorexia nervosa, with a normal weight group as the control group. The participants were shown an undistorted picture of their own bodies on a computer, which was used as the standard stimulus. A series of comparison stimulus, which were either thinner than, equal to, or fatter than the standard, were presented alongside the standard. Participants were instructed to judge differences in sizes--more specifically body width--between the standard comparison (p. 468).

The results demonstrated that individuals diagnosed with anorexia nervosa showed normal sensitivity but an increased bias toward seeing stimuli as thinner (p. 477). Therefore, this study found that a person with anorexia nervosa had normal sensitivity towards pictures shown them but did have bias towards being thinner. Overall the study showed that a disturbance at the level of the visual recording of body size is a poor

candidate for explaining body image disturbance in anorexia nervosa. The researchers believe that the relevance of this study lies in stressing the importance of uncovering the influence of cognitions and emotions in attention to visual perceptions they have that are influenced by cognitive and emotional reinforcements. They tell themselves they are fat, they feel they are fat ,and see themselves as fat, as opposed to remaining entangled in the preconceived vision of themselves. . (p. 477).

In a study conducted by Stanford and McCabe (2005), the researchers attempted to obtain a greater understanding of the impact of sociocultural influences on adolescent boys' body image and body change strategies. Specifically, the impact of messages from parents, close friends and the media about general body image, as well as messages related to losing weight and increasing muscles through both food and exercise strategies were evaluated. (p. 106). The participants were 362 adolescent boys between 12 and 14 years old. The researchers included sociocultural influences on a body image and body change questionnaire.

Researchers evaluated messages provided by fathers, mothers, male and female friends, and media. Specifically, messages about body shape, food, exercise, losing weight and increasing muscles were explored in relation to their impact on satisfaction with weight, muscles and body parts, and with strategies to decrease weight and strategies to increase muscle. The findings suggested that parents appear to provide the strongest and most consistent messages to young adolescent boys. It would be expected, however, that peers would have a greater influence in later adolescence. Findings indicated that the most significant messages appear to be related to muscles, the body attribute considered most important to males (p. 111).

Wills, Backett-Milburn, Gregory, and Lawton (2006), set out to discover whether, and how, weight and body size infiltrate other areas of teenagers' everyday lives; how these issues are experienced and perceived; and whether medical definitions of fatness are reflected in young peoples' discursive concerns (p. 399). They focused on 13 and 14 year olds, from Melbourne, Australia, in order to capture the considerable physical, social and emotional changes young teenagers go through, when body size and fatness are likely to be particularly salient. They chose 36 young people who agreed to be contacted about an interview. The group was gender balanced and half of the sample had a BMI classifying them as overweight or obese, while the rest were classified as being a *normal* weight.

The findings analyzed young teenagers' perceptions of their own and others' body weight and size. Researchers demonstrated that overweight and obese young teenagers have complex and, often, contradictory, feelings about their own and others' bodies. (p. 404). Young people with bodies defined by their BMI as overweight and obese referred to themselves as big and fat and also referred to others in this way. Other terms used included: *fatter, chubby, heavy, pudgy, stocky, tubby, overweight and obese* (p. 402). The researchers found that most teenagers expressed concern or frustration when others perceived that they were fat or wanted to lose weight; some characterized teasing as moving towards bullying (p. 405). Some said friends and family were unsupportive of their own attempts to lose weight, particularly if it involved crash dieting. Some of the participants expressed fear or dislike of extreme dieting, thinness, eating disorders, and anxiety of attention seeking behaviors related to a perceived body fat. Concerns about body image have led to serious attempts to create a better image; this in turn has led to

various eating disorders.

The Growing Concerns of Eating Disorders in Young Adults

In a recent study Kjelsas, Bjornstrom, and Gotestam (2004), looked at the prevalence of eating disorders in adolescents of both genders. The study consisted of 1987 adolescents (1034 girls and 953 boys) 14-15 years of age. The participants were given questionnaires about eating disorders.

The researchers found that the life and point prevalence of anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder were consistent with earlier studies in adolescent populations and figures from the (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), with somewhat elevated figures for boys. The results on eating disorders specified were alarming, and although based on self-reporting, they may indicate an elevated risk potential for eating disorders in 14- to - 15 year olds (p. 22).

Haines, Neumark-Sztainer, Eisenberg, and Hannan (2006), set out to assess whether weight-related teasing predicts the development of binge eating, unhealthy weight control behaviors, and frequent dieting among male and female adolescents. The study included 2516 adolescents who completed surveys at both times (1998-1999) and (2003-2004) of the Project EAT (Eating Among Teens) study (p. e209).

The survey responses of 1998-1999, showed that approximately one fourth of participants reported being teased about their weight at least a few times a year. The responses also showed that boys who were teased about their weight were more likely than their peers to initiate binge eating with loss of control and unhealthy weight control behaviors 5 years later. Girls who were teased were more likely than their peers to become frequent dieters. In conclusion, weight teasing in adolescence predicts

disordered eating behaviors at the 5-year follow-up. The patterns of these associations differ by gender. Reducing teasing through educational interventions and policies may reduce the level of disordered eating behaviors among youths (p. 210).

Patton, Selzer, Coffey, Carlin and Wolfe (1999) conducted a study in which they examined the predictors of eating disorders in an adolescent cohort. The cohort took place over a three year period with six waves. The participants were students, initially aged 14-15 years, from 44 secondary schools in Victoria, Australia (p. 765).

At the start of the study, 3.3% (29/888) of female subjects and 0.3% (2/811) of male subjects had partial syndromes of eating disorders. The rate of development of new eating disorder per 1000 person years of observation was 21.8 in female subjects and 6.0 in male subjects. Female subjects who dieted at a severe level were 18 times more likely to develop an eating disorder than those who did not diet, and female subjects who dieted at a moderate level were five times more likely to develop an eating disorder than those who did not diet. Psychiatric morbidity predicted the onset of eating disorder independently of dieting status so that those subjects in the highest morbidity category had an almost sevenfold increased risk of developing an eating disorder. After adjustment for earlier dieting and psychiatric morbidity, body mass index, extent of exercise, and sex were not predictive of new eating disorders (p. 765).

Researchers concluded that dieting is the most important predictor of new eating disorders. Differences in the incidence of eating disorders between sexes were largely accounted for by the high rates of earlier dieting and psychiatric morbidity in the female subjects. In adolescents, controlling weight by exercise rather than diet restriction seems to carry less risk of development of eating disorders (p. 768). The concerns teens have

about body image are further exasperated by what they see and hear in the media.

Negative Effects the Media has on Young Adults

Fallon and Hausenblas (2004) examined whether an acute bout of aerobic exercise moderates the negative psychological mood states elicited by media images of the *ideal* female body. Specifically they hypothesized that: (a) women viewing media images of the ideal body would report more anxiety, anger, depression, and body dissatisfaction compared to those viewing neutral pictures. (b) after viewing media images of the ideal female body, participants in the exercise condition would report less anxiety, anger, depression and body dissatisfaction compared to participants in the quiet rest condition (p. 66).

They studied 63 Caucasian female undergraduate students, who reported engaging in mild exercise an average of 4.07 times a week, moderate exercise 3.36 days per week, and strenuous exercise 3.46 days per week, yielding an average energy expenditure of 59.13 metabolic equivalents per week during exercise.

They found that the women viewing media pictures of the ideal body (regardless of the exercise/quiet rest condition) reported increased body dissatisfaction and depression compared to those viewing neutral pictures. The media pictures did not increase anxiety, or anger compared to the neutral pictures. Contrary to their hypothesis, those viewing the media pictures, and those engaging in the exercise bout did not report less body dissatisfaction, anxiety, anger, or depression compared to those in quiet rest.

So in conclusion, the study findings substantiated the research that women experience an increase in negative mood states after viewing media's portrayal of the *ideal* female physique but fails to corroborate research indicating that acute exercise

decreases body image disturbance. An acute bout of aerobic exercise was not able to moderate the negative mood states elicited by pictures of the *ideal* female body portrayed the mass media compared to the quiet rest. Thus, the mass media's portrayal of the *ideal* female physique remains a powerful and persuasive influence on the negative mood and body dissatisfaction of women despite overtly engaging in behaviors (i.e., exercise) that promote positive changes in health and body shape (p. 73).

McCabe and Ricciardelli (2005), set out to determine the predictive role of sociocultural influences (parents, peers, media) on body image and behaviors to either lose weight or increase muscle, as well as the use of extreme weight loss behaviors at three time points over a 16 month time period among adolescent boys and girls. This study was focused on evaluating the social component of the biopsychosocial framework to explain health risk behaviors to achieve the ideal body endorsed by society (p. 654).

The participants in this study at time 1 were 494 boys (mean age-13.08 years) and 359 girls (mean age 12.89 years) enrolled in grade 7 at high school. The participants in this study at time 2 were 438 boys (13.74) and 338 girls(13.61) and at time 3 the participants were 344 boys (14.49) and 246 girls(14.22). The analyses for the 2005 paper were based on the responses of 590 participants (344 boys and 246 girls). (p. 657).

The researchers concluded that at all points in time, girls were more likely to adopt strategies to lose weight and extreme weight lose strategies; whereas, boys were more likely to adopt strategies to increase muscles. Over the 16 month period the study found that both boys and girls increased their use of extreme body change strategies over time, with girls showing a greater increase than boys. In regards to the pressures to lose weight the researchers found that perceived messages to lose weight from peers and

media were higher for girls than boys, whereas the perceived messages from mothers, fathers and female friends to increase muscles were higher for boys than for girls. Perceived messages from female friends and the media increased for girls, and perceived messages from the media increased for boys. Thus, friends and media are clearly targets for prevention programs for adolescent girls, as would sociocultural influences that are perceived to increase their messages over the adolescent period for girls to lose weight in order to conform to the sociocultural ideal for girls.

Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2004) examined the impact of televised images of idealized male attractiveness, in attention to female attractiveness, or adolescent body image. Effects on underlying process, and individual differences in reaction, were also examined (p. 353). The study consisted of 595 adolescent students (310 girls, 285 boys) from 2 South Australian metropolitan coeducation public high schools of medium socio-economic status. Students were in years 8-12 with a mean age of 14.3 (p. 354).

The researchers concluded that exposure to ideal commercials led to significant greater body dissatisfaction and negative affect among girls than non-appearance commercials. The results show that muscular-ideal television commercials had only a limited impact on boys' body image, and on average, exposure to muscular-ideal commercials did not lead to increased body dissatisfaction. Overall the results suggest that the media's immediate impact on body image is both stronger and more normative for girls than boys (p. 361). The results suggest that unrealistic ideals of beauty in the media are an important source of social comparison, and possible cause of body dissatisfaction among certain girls and boys. It remains unclear how these short-lasting effects might generalize to real world media exposure (p.361).

Summary

The above literature shows the growing problems associated with obesity in today's society. Body image is a concern that is perpetuated by the media's influence. Everyday adolescents are faced with being ideal in their bodies. Smeets, Ingleby, Hoek, Hans and Panhuysen (1999) explored the issue of body size perception, comparing females with anorexia nervosa with controls (p. 467). Overall the study showed that a disturbance at the level of the visual recording of body size is a poor candidate for explaining body image disturbance in anorexia nervosa. Adolescents often are faced with social and physical pressures from peers, parents and the world around them. Wills, Backett-Milburn, Gregory, and Lawton (2006) set out to discover whether, and how, weight and body size infiltrate other areas of teenagers' everyday lives; how these issues are experienced and perceived; and whether medical definitions of fatness are reflected in young peoples' discursive concerns (p. 399). The researchers found that most teenagers expressed concern or frustration when others perceived that they were fat or wanted to lose weight; some characterized teasing as moving towards bullying (p. 405). Often these influences from the world around them, pushes the adolescent into the world of eating disorders. Eating disorders are a growing concern around the world. The behaviors exhibited while trying to lose weight have become a growing concern during the adolescent years. Haines, Neumark-Sztainer, Eisenberg, and Hannan (2006) set out to assess whether weight-related teasing predicts the development of binge eating, unhealthy weight control behaviors, and frequent dieting among male and female adolescents. The survey responses of 1998-1999, showed that approximately one fourth of participants reported being teased about their weight at least a few times a year. The

responses also showed that boys who were teased about their weight were more likely than their peers to initiate binge eating with loss of control and unhealthy weight control behaviors 5 years later. Girls who were teased were more likely than their peers to become frequent dieters. With the overwhelming media influences, teens are trying to be what the media portrays as the ideal body. Fallon and Hausenblas (2004), examined whether an acute bout of aerobic exercise moderates the negative psychological mood states elicited by media images of the *ideal* female body. They found that the women viewing media pictures of the ideal body (regardless of the exercise/quiet rest condition) reported increased body dissatisfaction and depression compared to those viewing neutral pictures. The current study will examine the different areas and how they are portrayed in the literature that will be reviewed.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Young adults are more obese than ever before; yet the influences from outside sources are more prevalent in the world today to be thin. It is important that young adults today view obesity as a growing concern and realize that being thin is not the end of the world. Often young adult literature portrays obese characters inaccurately. The negative portrayals of obesity promote eating disorders, teasing and an overall negative attitude towards the young adult. It is also important for young adults to realize the growing concerns in regards to obesity.

Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative content analysis to examine the negative portrayal of obese young adults in young adult literature. Myers & Hansen (2002) define content analysis as “a system for quantifying responses to open questions by categorizing them according to objective rules or guidelines” (p. 533). Another researcher maintains that content analysis is an “objective, systematic, and quantitative method of describing content” (Bekkedal, 1973, p. 110). Content analysis allows the researcher to have an objective description of the content within the book that has been systematically selected. The quantitative nature of the study is dictated by the inquiry of a social or human problem, based on testing theory, composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures. The purpose of such an analysis is to determine whether the predictive generalizations of theory hold true (Creswell, 1994, p. 2).

Researchers used quantitative measures and systematic examples in an attempt to control

bias and subjectivity.

Content analysis was chosen as the methodology for this study because it is systematic, objective, and allows the researcher to investigate the negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult literature. Kingsley (2002), Berthesen (2006), and Weber (1992), used content analysis for similar studies.

Selection of Book Population

The focus of this study investigated the negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction for grades 6-12. The 18 books included in this study met the following criteria: a) copyright dates no older than 1999, b) authors and a setting in the United States. The book population was randomly selected using online catalogs in the UNI library, the Davenport School District libraries, and the Bettendorf Public library. Search terms will be **Obesity-adolescents, Obesity-teenagers, Obesity-young adults, Eating disorders-juvenile fiction, Eating disorder-juvenile literature**. To be selected for analysis, the book must have an obese character or a character that views themselves as obese. The character must face the concerns associated with obesity, including teasing, eating disorders, dieting, and social issues related to obesity. The list of books analyzed can be found in Appendix A.

Data Gathering Instrument

The data gathering instrument used in this study will be one designed by the researcher and include questions devised that will correlate with the problem statement: the investigation into the portrayals of obese characters in young adult fiction. A checklist will be developed to look at three major categories. The first was to look at the characteristics attributed to obese characters. These characteristics were classified as

physical, psychological, behavioral or social characteristics. Under each category were negative and positive adjectives to describe these characteristics. Each word or phrase will be identified as a positive, negative or neutral characteristic. The symbol “-” denotes a negative, “+” denotes a positive, and a “0” denotes a neutral status. The researcher will then tabulate attributes for a single title, “-” has a value of negative one, “+” a value of positive one and “0” a value of zero. Tabulating these positive and negative attributes will allow the researcher to determine if an obese character was portrayed negatively, positively or neutrally. The second category reported on whether the character was portrayed as trying to lose weight, and finally if weight loss led to acceptance, admiration, or personal happiness. The data gathering instrument is Appendix B.

Procedures

Before the Data Gathering Instrument is applied to the books in the study, it will be used with a title not included and adjustments will be made. No adjustments were needed. A computer program will be used to organize titles read. As the researcher read each title, the following information was recorded: author, title, publisher, and date. A brief plot summary and main character description for each title will be included. The data from each book was then be analyzed for the categories researched in order to demonstrate the way that obese characters are portrayed in young adult literature.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This content analysis attempted to determine if obese characters in Young Adult fiction are portrayed in a way that reflects actual research about obese people. Eighteen books written since 1999 were identified and tested against the hypothesis. The books included nineteen characters who met the criteria to analyze. The criteria included obese characters or characters that view themselves as obese. The character must face the concerns associated with obesity, including teasing, eating disorders, dieting, and social issues related to obesity.

Hypothesis 1: None of the characters in the books in this study will suffer from ridicule and peer rejection. Table one summarizes the results of the incidences of ridicule and peer rejection.

Table 1: Incidences of Ridicule and Peer Rejection

	Teased	Bullied	Rejected By Peers
# of Characters	16	9	10

Sixteen of the nineteen characters in the books were teased by their peers or parents. Nine of the nineteen characters were bullied by their peers and ten of the nineteen characters were rejected by their peers. Jim Kelly in *Fat Boy Swim* (Forde, 2003) was often teased with numerous different attempts at teasing him portrayed in this novel. Two incidents stick out: “Wasn’t right, swimming us against a whale. I couldn’t get

around his arse to overtake him. See the tidal wave when he dove in?” and “There should be a law against blubber like that, man. Doesn’t his blubber make you barf?” Another character Carmen from the book *Massive* (Bell, 2006) endured many negative comments including: “Couldn’t resist it, could you piggy?” and “Miss piggy off to trough.” Lara from *Life in the Fat Lane* (Bennett, 1999) was once a beauty pageant winner who suddenly became fat and endured the teasing that she once used to do. She then became the brunt of many negative comments including: “Thar she blows!”, “You’re really fat now. Not just chubby or anything.”, “I mean, she’s as fat as Patty Asher.” And “Lard Ass.”

In reference to the hypothesis made, these data do not support the hypothesis that none of the characters in the books in this study will suffer from ridicule and peer rejection. Almost all of the characters were either the subject of ridicule and peer rejection. The data gave overwhelming results and Hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: None of the books in this study will suggest that losing weight will ensure personal happiness. Table 2 summarizes whether the obese character achieved personal happiness, admiration or if weight loss led to acceptance by peers.

Table 2: Gratification from Losing Weight

	Admiration	Lead to Acceptance	Personal Happiness
# of characters	7	8	9

Seven of the nineteen characters had some form of admiration for losing weight from peers. Eight of the nineteen characters achieved some sort of acceptance by their peers and nine of the nineteen characters achieved a level of personal happiness. Cam from the

book *Fat Camp* (Blumenthal, 2006) achieved admiration, acceptance and personal happiness.

“She got the dog she wanted for succeeding at camp. Now that I have been home from camp for awhile and everyone has noticed that I lost weight and commented on how “amazing” I look, the dust starts to settle and real life starts up again. As for me, I know the cards are stacked against me and that I am a prisoner to my genes, because they have a lot to do with how much I want to eat and when. So I am strong some days and weak others. And most of all, I spent two months at camp with people who taught me that there are lots of reasons why people gain weight, lots of reasons why they lose it, and lots of reasons why they can or can’t keep it off. So knowing that makes me feel better about myself. At least for now, the face in the mirror is a happier one than the picture on the refrigerator.” Cam felt good about herself after weight loss.

April from the book *Huge* (Paley, 2007) wanted to lose weight and had saved money for Wellness Canyon a weight loss spa and in the end she found personal happiness and a whole lot more. Boys thought she “looked pretty awesome.”, “You look pretty” and “You look really hot!” Her roommate Wil thought “It’s a cool dress (she did look really pretty). April herself was surprised at how the dress revealed an almost entirely new body. And in the end she got “Everything she wanted when she left Wellness Canyon eight weeks ago was finally coming true.”

In reference to the hypothesis made, the data do not support that none of the books in this study will suggest that losing weight will ensure personal happiness. In fact a high number of characters achieved a level of personal happiness by losing weight. Hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Hypothesis 3: None of the young adult fiction books in this study will portray obesity in a negative manner. Table 3 shows the portrayal of obese characters in the young adult fiction books in this study. Table 4 shows additional adjectives used in the young adult fiction books used in this study.

Table 3: Character portrayal in books analyzed

	Fatter	Chubby	Heavy	Pudgy	Stocky	Tubby	Fat	Big	Overweight	Obese
Negative	33	13	7	6	0	0	626	80	32	10
Positive	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	19	2	0
Neutral	1	2	2	0	0	0	47	78	2	0

Table 4: Additional adjectives that mean fat

	Plump	Huge	Blob	Pig	Enormous	Lard	Fatso	Fatty	Bigger	Piggy
Negative	1	39	3	50	4	18	4	5	6	8
Positive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Neutral	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0

Every book that was read for the content analysis had negativity throughout. Fat was used 626 times negatively throughout the eighteen books analyzed. *Life in the Fat Lane* (Bennett, 1999) used fat 155 times negatively. *Faded Denim: Color Me Trapped* (Carlsen, 2006) used fat 60 times negatively. *Massive* (Bell, 2006) used fat 42 times negatively. *Upstream* (Hoekstra, 2001) used fat 58 times negatively. Big was used 80 times in a negatively throughout the 18 books analyzed. Big was used negatively 15 times in *Fat Boy Swim* (Forde, 2003). Big was used in *Life in the Fat Lane* (Bennett,

1999) 12 times negatively. Other words used negatively in large numbers throughout the 18 books analyzed include: fatter, chubby and overweight. Alternative adjectives that had large numbers were pig (50) and huge (38).

In reference to the hypothesis made, none of the young adult fiction books in this study will portray obesity in a negative manner; the data do not support this hypothesis. In fact the books read overwhelmingly portray young adult books about obesity in a negative manner. Hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

As obesity becomes an overwhelming problem in the United States, many things have influenced the idea that people have to be thin and perfect. The media has definitely had a big influence through TV and magazines. Peers have begun bullying and teasing obese people and just treating them differently. Many times it is assumed that everyone is treated the same and unfortunately with obesity this is not the case.

Summary

This study investigated the negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction. This researcher discovered that obese characters are not only portrayed negatively but the characters were treated negatively also. Throughout sixteen of the nineteen books the characters were either bullied or teased by their peers or parents. In an overwhelming number of books there was a negative spin put on the physical characteristics.

Conclusions

This researcher was surprised to find that young adult literature portrays obese characters in such a negative manner. This researcher expected to find obese characters to be treated the same way as a non-obese character. This researcher speculates that obese characters are portrayed in a negative manner for several reasons.

1. The influence of the media on how a person has to look or should look.
2. The information about how unhealthy it is to be obese and the never ending

stories on TV and in magazines to that effect.

3. The fact that young adults take influences from other peers and outside sources and then treat their obese peers in a negative manner.

The characters had many of their own self images that pushed them to the extreme weight loss or depression. Wil in *Huge* (Paley, 2007) couldn't wait to gain weight at Wellness Canyon just to spite her parents who owned fitness clubs and did not want their fat daughter representing their family. Carmen in *Massive* (Bell, 2006) had a weight problem her whole life and the fact that her mom was so thin and constantly pushing her to be thin did not help in her own self image. In order to become thin like others wanted she began to binge eat and throw up. Nicole in *Keeping the Moon* (Dessen, 1999) was always fat and so was her mother and one day her mom became the thin, aerobics queen. Nicole, even though she had lost weight, still lacked the confidence to actually be happy. Her self image always was lacking. These characters often had a lack of self image.

Obesity was portrayed in the books in a mostly negative manner. In *Faded Denim: Color Me Trapped* (Carlson, 2006) Emily was treated in a negative manner throughout the book. One character in the book asked "Putting on some weight, Emily?" Another character said "Clothes that are too tight just make you look fat." Eric in *Staying Fat for Sarah Barnes* (Crutcher, 2000) was treated negatively many times including "'Where's that fat ass Calhoun? 'He's a dead man.'" And "I think you got a big ol' fat ass whale in there." Jin in *Fat Boy Swim* (Forde, 2003) was constantly teased and included many negative comments including "You missed a spot fatso." and "fat boy fat." So within the books and research obesity was portrayed negatively.

Weight loss for the character either had a "good" or a "bad" consequence. One of

the “good” included Jim in *Fat Boy Swim* (Forde, 2003), had lost weight and became a swimming champ. The spectators were clapping even before the announcement was over and Jim thought “so this is what winning tastes like?” One of the “bad” was Pig in *Pig and Shrink* (Todd, 1999) “I was happy being who I was and I could be happy again if you’d just quit treating me like your dumb guinea pig and leave me alone.” So weight loss brought good and bad to the characters in the book.

Future Studies

Future studies could investigate teenagers who have eating disorders and how they feel they look. Many of the books had characters who thought they were fat although most were not and they were definitely not obese. Another possible investigation could be about what led the obese characters to eat and gain weight. A large majority of the characters either lost a parent or their parents were divorced. It might be interesting to see if they started gaining weight when the negative events happened in their lives.

It seems that people work so hard on creating equal right for others and not allowing discrimination; that people would work hard to treat obese people in the same way. This researcher learned that books portray obese characters in a negative way.

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Appendix A

Book Index

- Bell, Julia. (2006). *Massive*. New York: Simon Pulse.
- Bennett, Cherie. (1999). *Life in the Fat Lane*. New York: Laurel Leaf Books.
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Appendix B

Data Gathering Instrument

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:			
Title:			
Author:		Publisher:	
Date:			

Summary:

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat			
Big			
Overweight			
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem		

Anxiety		
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased		
Bullied		
Well Liked		
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers		
Other		

Evidence:

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance		
Personal Happiness		

Evidence:

Appendix C

Completed Data Gathering Instruments

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	April		
Title:	Huge		
Author:	Sasha Paley	Publisher:	Simon & Schuster
Date:	2007		

Summary:

April and Wil couldn't be any different. Wil was rich and April had saved for a year to attend Wellness Canyon. Wellness Canyon was a weight loss spa and April wanted to lose weight and be popular like she always wanted. Wil had to go for her parents (against her will). Her parents owned exercise clubs and they did not like that their daughter was fat. April couldn't wait to get to work and Wil couldn't wait to get out of there. Wil planned on gaining weight this summer. In the end they both lose weight and gain a new best friend. This is a story of finding out who you are no matter what size you are.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby	5		
Heavy	2		
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	4		
Big	1		
Overweight	2		
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Plump	1		
Bulge	2		
Huge	2		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression	X	
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		X
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		X
Crash dieting		X
Bulimia		X
Anorexia		X
Other: fat camp	X	X

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied	X	
Well Liked		X
Part of Popular Group		X
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other		

Evidence:

“That ponytail makes your face look fat”

“Hey pork chops!”

“Lard ass”

“Hey check it out fat camp runaways”

“Moo”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration	X	
Lead to Acceptance	X	
Personal Happiness	X	

Evidence:

“Well, you looked pretty awesome.”

“It’s a cool dress (she did look really pretty)

She was surprised at how the dress revealed an almost entirely new body.

“You look pretty”

“You look really hot!”

“Everything she wanted when she left Wellness Canyon eight weeks ago was finally coming true.”

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Cam		
Title:	Fat Camp		
Author:	Deborah Blumenthal	Publisher:	NAL Jam Books
Date:	2006		

Summary:

A group of overweight teenagers spend eight weeks at “Fat Camp” to lose weight. Camp Calliope, prison camp for the overweight, is a place where you find controlled portions, rigorous exercise, and sleep in a room full of other overweight girls. Here she meets five girls who Cam shares secrets and weight lose with. She also meets Jesse a boy from the Boys Camp and they have a connection. Eight weeks at camp prove to be a good thing. Cam needs to lose weight because she says she was born with fat genes (parents are slim).

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy	2		
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	25		8
Big	1	1	3
Overweight	8	1	1
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Gynormous	1		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression	X	
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		X
Other: anger	X	

But in your teens, your friends buy bikinis, but you can't—they don't fit—and if they do, you hate the repulsive way you look anyway. Other girls hook up with guys or at least get asked to the movies or to hang out, but you don't. You're "fat" and unpopular and have thunder thighs. You hear guys whistle, you never turn around—it's not for you; in fact, you pray they don't yell out something that would make you die of embarrassment.

Character assassination on myself:

1. Is it my weight that's making me feel like a total misfit?
2. Is it just me?
3. Why don't I fit in?
4. Exactly where should I put the blame for my total misery?

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		X
Crash dieting		X
Bulimia		X
Anorexia		X
Other: Fat Camp (weight Lose), many diets	X	

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased		
Bullied		
Well Liked	X	
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers		
Other: parental		

Evidence:

She is well liked by Jesse. The two spend a lot of time together writing the camp newspaper and even kiss.

My mom insists that this self-destructive cycle has to come to an end or I'll be an "overweight and unhappy adult".

This is how she feels: Punishment is the operative word for this place:

1. We punish ourselves for being fat.
2. Our families punish us for being fat.
3. Friends punish us for being fat.
4. Strangers punish us for being fat, either by dissing us with clichéd remarks (i.e., “fat pig”) or simply pretending that we don’t exist.

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration	X	
Lead to Acceptance	X	
Personal Happiness	X	

Evidence:

She got the dog she wanted for succeeding at camp. Now that I have been home from camp for awhile and everyone has noticed that I lost weight and commented on how “amazing” I look, the dust starts to settle and real life starts up again. As for me, I know the cards are stacked against me and that I am a prisoner to my genes, because they have a lot to do with how much I want to eat and when. So I am strong some days and weak others.

And most of all, I spent two months at camp with people who taught me that there are lots of reasons why people gain weight, lots of reasons why they lose it, and lots of reasons why they can or can’t keep it off. So knowing that makes me feel better about myself. At least for now, the face in the mirror is a happier one than the picture on the refrigerator.

Additional quotes: “The whole world sees the ideal woman as being thin and everybody else who isn’t butt-ugly and repulsive, so it’s easy to be brainwash yourself into thinking that your only goal in life is to stay thin, so that’s all you think about.”

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Carmen		
Title:	Massive		
Author:	Julia Bell	Publisher:	Simon Pulse
Date:	2006		

Summary:

Carmen has had a weight problem her whole life. It doesn’t help that her mom is so thin and is always pressuring her to be thin. One day they leave and move to a new home in Birmingham and all Carmen wants now is to be thin so guys won’t try and take advantage of her (like what happened at the party). She decides she wants to be thin so she quits eating and then she starts binging and throwing up. She wonders if being thin

will make a difference in her life.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy	1		1
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	42		
Big	5		13
Overweight			
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Pig	6		
Huge	4		
Enormous	1		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging	X	
Crash dieting	X	
Bulimia	X	
Anorexia	X	
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied		
Well Liked		

Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers		
Other		

Evidence:

“You’ll always have to watch your weight”

“We’re supposed to be on a diet. How is she ever going to learn if you keep giving her food?”

“Get a few pounds off you”

“Dear god, girl, do you want to be fat and unhappy?”

“We’ve been getting fat”

“If you weren’t so heavy, Carmen, you wouldn’t put so much pressure on your feet.”

“If you want to behave like a pig.”

“I can’t believe it you’re too big for a size 10.”

“I bet she didn’t tell you, that you look fat in that top.”

“Yeah, fat cow.”

“You’re too fat in the face for that.”

“Couldn’t resist it, could you piggy?”

“Miss piggy off to trough.”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration	X	
Lead to Acceptance		
Personal Happiness		

Evidence:

“Gorgeous”

“Pig I say to the mirror, pig

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Colie (Nicole Sparks)		
Title:	Keeping the moon		
Author:	Sarah Dessen	Publisher:	Viking
Date:	1999		

Summary:

Nicole had always been overweight and so had her mother. Over time Nicole’s mother had lost a lot of weight and became the aerobics queen Kiki Sparks. Nicole had lost the weight too but still lacked the confidence to be happy. That summer Nicole was sent to stay with her eccentric Aunt Mira. Back home, Nicole is still considered the loser, formerly fat and easy. Then while visiting her aunt she meets Monica and Isabel. These two help her see herself in a new way and she finally realizes the potential to be who she

is. Nicole spends a summer finding the real her and is happy for once.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy	1		
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	19		
Big			
Overweight	2		
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Lard	1		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other: diet/exercise	X	

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied		
Well Liked		

Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other		

Evidence:

“It would be a shame to gain all that weight back.”

“Fat ass!”

“Lard-o”

“Thunder thighs”

Even though I had been teased all my life, I’d always taken a small, strange comfort I the folds of my fat, the fact that I could grab myself at the waist.

“Fat and easy”

“Stuffin’ for nothing”

Someone laughing. I looked up still dancing, to see a boy run across the cafeteria with his cheeks puffed out, moving like a hippopotamus, his legs straight and locked, rocking back and forth. Everyone was standing around watching him, giggling. The more they laughed, the more pronounced he became; sticking out his tongue, rolling his eyes in his head. It took a few seconds to realize he was imitating me. And by that point everyone was staring.

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance		
Personal Happiness	X	

Evidence:

“Instantly I was fat again, my face broken out, pulling my black trench coat tighter to hide myself. Except I didn’t have a coat, or those forty-five-and-a-half pounds. I was a wide-open target.

You’re gorgeous tonight, Colie. Show yourself off a little bit.

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Emily		
Title:	Faded Denim: color me trapped		
Author:	Melody Carlson	Publisher:	Think Books
Date:	2006		

Summary:

All of Emily’s friends are skinny and perfect. They’re skinny and pretty and, of course, are fun and flirty to boot. Especially Leah, who, as Emily remembers used to be the chubby girl in school. Now Leah is on her way to becoming a model. Emily loathes her slightly overweight body, her insecure personality and sometimes even her ‘perfect’

friends. Emily takes some drastic measures, putting herself in danger of death. She turns to eating disorders to help her become 'perfect'. And to top it off she has to go to modeling school with Leah for two weeks. So losing weight has become a high priority.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter	3		
Chubby	1		
Heavy	2		
Pudgy	2		
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	60	2	3
Big	10	4	14
Overweight	7	1	
Obese	4		

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Pig	5		
Fatso	1		
Thunder thighs	2		
Blubber	1		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression	X	
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other:		

I hate feeling like this-like I am fat and ugly and like I am a total Loser with a capital L. It makes me sick.

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging	X	
Crash dieting	X	
Bulimia	X	
Anorexia	X	
Other: comfort eating	X	

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied		
Well Liked		
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers		
Other		

Evidence:

“Emily are you sure you want to eat that Snickers bar since it has 500 calories that will probably end up sitting right on your thighs?”

“Putting on some weight, Emily?”

“Fine and fat”

“If you take off some weight”

“Clothes that are too tight just make you look fat”

“I think you’re losing some of your baby fat”

“Better get up and moving if you want to keep it off”

“And remember Emily is trying to lose weight.”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance		
Personal Happiness	X	

Evidence:

I think I look way better than I did a month ago. I have lost inches, because I do look thinner than before.

My clothes are getting baggy.

“I’ve lost more weight.”

“I still feel happier than I have felt all summer”

“All I know is that I am thankful that god gave me the body he did. “

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Eric		
Title:	Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes		
Author:	Chris Crutcher	Publisher:	Bantam Doubleday books
Date:	2000		

Summary:

Eric “Moby” Calhoun has always had a diet of Oreos and Twinkies. His best friend Sarah Byrnes was burned as a child and is called “scarface” at school. These two become friends and write the *Crispy Pork Rind* an underground school newspaper. One day Sarah quits talking and Eric knows he has to help. During this time Eric starts losing weight since he started the swim team, gains acceptance and even a girlfriend. For the longest time he felt he had to stay fat or risk losing Sarah as a friend. The truth from Sarah’s past becomes known and Eric tries to save her from her abusive and out of control dad. In the end they remain friends even though Eric has lost weight.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	27		6
Big	2		2
Overweight			
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Chunks	3		
Fat ass whale	1		
Pig	2		
Lard	2		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression	X	
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other: anger		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other: workouts/swimming		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied	X	
Well Liked		
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other:		

Evidence:

Might as well trust a fat kid

“Big and solid”

“I’ll just take it from your fat friend.”

“You fat little dork.”

“Where’s that fat ass Calhoun? He’s a dead man.”

“I think you got a big ol’ fat ass whale in there.”

“Oh fat boy.”

“1-800-fat-boy”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance	X	
Personal Happiness	X	

Evidence:

“Look Sarah Byrnes. I’ve proved I’m your friend. I didn’t go off after I lost weight and leave you behind.”

“So I am lying here thinking I may have a girlfriend or something.”

Jody wants to go out with you

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Isabelle Lee		
Title:	Perfect		
Author:	Natasha Friend	Publisher:	Milkweed editions
Date:	2004		

Summary: Isabelle began throwing up the day of her dad’s funeral. She felt like she is fat. She is not part of the popular group at school. One day Isabelle gets caught throwing

up by her sister and finds herself attending the “eating disorder and body image group therapy”. On the first night in walks Ashley—the most popular girl in school. She is asked to eat at the “popular “table one day and watches as the group teases an overweight boy and she thinks “nice friends.” In a world where girls need to be perfect...the girls find ways to cope.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	12		2
Big	3		
Overweight			
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fat pig	1		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression	X	
Low Self Esteem		
Anxiety		
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting		
Bulimia	X	
Anorexia		
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
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Teased		
Bullied		
Well Liked	X	
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other		

Evidence:

You have to be asked to sit at certain tables. No boy would think to pass a note to them or me. She is the kind of person you wish you could be friends with, even though she doesn't know you exist.

After starting group with popular Ashley: "want to come sit at our table?" (Ashley asked). A girl from the group asks "are you new this year? I haven't seen you before." I mumbled "I've been here my whole life."

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance	X	
Personal Happiness		

Evidence:

Breakfast with Ashley and shopping at the mall. Ashley stops by with Christmas presents and says "I like giving presents better than getting them anyways." "I'm really going to miss you."

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Jennifer Harris/Jenna Vaughn (same person)		
Title:	Sweetheart		
Author:	Sara Zarr	Publisher:	Little, Brown and company
Date:	2008		

Summary: Jennifer Harris was a fat child, who was constantly teased and made fun of. She had one friend, Cameron Quick, who liked her no matter, what. One day when they were 9 Cameron disappeared and Jennifer was told he was dead. Eight years later Jennifer (r Jenna now) receives a letter from Cameron on her birthday that changes things. Cameron is back and now Jenna is a popular girl with a boyfriend and lots of friends. She has to relive her past and realize she is still Jenna stuck in Jennifer's past. She begins binging again when she is upset. But in the end Cameron goes away again and Jenna continues her life (as if Jennifer was still the past) and Cameron goes back to his life and Jenna went to college.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	5		
Big			
Overweight			
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fattifer	4		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging	X	
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied	X	
Well Liked	X	

Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers		
Other		

Evidence:

At 9: Matt called her fat and smelly. Kids in her class called her fattifer. Often called big fat baby. Cameron's dad said to her one day "my son's a chubby chaser, huh?" Her new friends did not know about the fat girl, cootie twin, the loner and the reject. The truth "that I am ugly and fat and no one wants to be my friend."

At 17: She had many friends Stacy, Katy, Gil and many more. Had a boyfriend, Ethan. Yet none of them knew her past. She did not want to go back to "fattifer".

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration	X	
Lead to Acceptance	X	
Personal Happiness	X	

Evidence:

Had many friends and was happy until Cameron came back. But in the end her life was still happy.

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Jimmy Kelly		
Title:	Fat Boy Swim		
Author:	Catherine Forde	Publisher:	Delacorte Press
Date:	2003		

Summary:

Jimmy is known as fat boy fat...and the largest kid in his community. Jimmy is constantly teased and his secret passion as a chef may get him more ridicule. One day coach finds out his secret and vows to help him lose weight through swimming. Swimming becomes his passion and he manages to break swim records and lose weight. Along the way he finds out his father was a championship swimmer in the same school. One day his secret comes out as he cooks all the food for a fund raising event. In the end he finds out that his father is alive and he gets the girl, Ellie.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy	1		
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	34		3
Big	15	7	5
Overweight	1		
Obese	2		

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Pig	5		
Fatty	5		
Huge	4	3	
Fatso	3		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other: swimming	X	

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied	X	
Well Liked		

Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other		

Evidence:

“Oi, boobsy. Move your fat butt! We’re under pressure here.”

“Here, big man.”

“Fat buy fat.”

“Useless butterball shouldn’t be allowed anywhere near a pitch.”

“You missed a spot fatso...”

“I didn’t know there are red-haired whales.”

“Wasn’t right, swimming us against a whale. I couldn’t get around his arse to overtake him. See the tidal wave when he dove in?”

“There should be a law against blubber like that, man. Doesn’t his blubber make you barf?”

“Come on fatty. You were just hungry.”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration	X	
Lead to Acceptance	X	
Personal Happiness		

Evidence:

Spectators were clapping even before the announcement was over. So this is what winning tastes like.

Has a girlfriend, Ellie...holding her hand tight. Just then his lips found Ellie’s.

Everyone including Victor applauded him.

“Jimmy Kelly is that you? What a transformation!”

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Judi		
Title:	Fat Chance		
Author:	Leslie Newman	Publisher:	The Putnam and Grossett Group
Date:	2000		

Summary:

Judi has 2 secret desires to be the thinnest girl in the entire eighth grade and to be Mrs. Richard Weiss. She is convinced if she had “creamy thighs and amazing cheekbones that I look like I am sipping through a straw, her best friend Monica wouldn’t have stolen her almost boyfriend. So when she meets pencil thin Nancy, she desperately tries to be like her. Even if that means suffering through Nancy’s bulimia. Judi’s life soon spins out of

control with her obsession with food, calories and pounds. Weight is no longer a typical problem but a matter of life and death.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter	10		
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	20		
Big	5		
Overweight			
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		X
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety	X	
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging	X	
Crash dieting		
Bulimia	X	
Anorexia		
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied		X
Well Liked		X

Part of Popular Group		X
Rejected by Peers		X
Other		

Evidence:

“Hey Miss Piggy, want to know how to get rid of 10 pounds...cut off your head.”

“Blimp”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		X
Lead to Acceptance		X
Personal Happiness		X

Evidence:

Weighs 127 pounds at end of story and still thinks she is fat...according to *Seventeen* magazine she is 7 pounds overweight.

“I know I’m fat and I don’t mind. I just wish that the world was a gentler place and people weren’t mean to those people who happen to be fat.”

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Kathryn		
Title:	Upstream		
Author:	Molly Hoekstra	Publisher:	Tudor Publishers
Date:	2001		

Summary:

Kathryn is a teenage anorexic who is placed in an institution by her mother. Her mother is an actress who has little time for her daughter. Kathryn copes with her mounting frustration over anger, denial and depression. Over time Kathryn confronts the medical issues in front of her. She lost her father in an accident and that seems to be when her problems began. Kathryn “thinks she is fat”, that is the negative in her life. And knows that she cannot go home until she eats and “gets fat”.

Physical Characteristics: in her mind these words are either -, + or neutral.

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter	5		1
Chubby			
Heavy			1
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	58	0	15

Big	2	3	6
Overweight	3		1
Obese	1		

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression	X	
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other: Anger		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting	X	
Bulimia		
Anorexia	X	
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased		
Bullied		
Well Liked		
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers		
Other		

Evidence:

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance		
Personal Happiness	X	

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Evidence:

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Lara		
Title:	Life in the Fat Lane		
Author:	Cherie Bennett	Publisher:	Laurel Leaf books
Date:	1999		

Summary: Her best friend, Molly, has been her best friend since third grade. She has always been plump and Lara was slender.

Lara, a former beauty pageant winner, suddenly becomes fat. Lara one day becomes fat even though she is following a strict diet and exercise program. Soon she balloons into a 200 pound plus girl. Once popular she soon becomes nameless and faceless. She is desperate to get her body back and to find an explanation for her rapid weight gain. She is diagnosed with a mysterious metabolic disorder and worries she will be trapped in the fat body forever. She moves to Michigan and ends up teased and bullied by Dave Ackerly.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter	8		
Chubby	5		2
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	155	4	5
Big	12		9
Overweight	1		
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Huge	13		5
Lard	15		
Pig	10		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression	X	
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety	X	
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging	X	
Crash dieting	X	
Bulimia	X	
Anorexia		
Other: dieting	X	

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied		
Well Liked	X	
Part of Popular Group	X	
Rejected by Peers		
Other		

Evidence:

Before becoming fat: I was sixteen, madly in love with the most fantastic guy in the universe, and about to get ready for the school's homecoming dance.

"Everyone knows you are the most popular girl in the school."

"I hope you win queen."

Homecoming queen...junior year.

Becoming fat: "It'll take the lard off real fast."

"One day you are perfect, and the next you wake up looking like Molly."

"You're lucky Jett has stuck by you. Do you think your father would still be with me if I let myself go like that?" (From mom)

"How's my big, beautiful doll?"

"Now there's just more of you to love."

"Thar she blows!"

"You're really fat now. Not just chubby or anything."

"I mean, she's as fat as Patty Asher."

"Oh my god. Look at that girl."

"Lardass"

“Didn’t you ever hear ‘the bigger the cushion, the better the pushin?’”

“I hope the gym floor holds”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance		
Personal Happiness		

Evidence:

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Lara		
Title:	Larger-Than-Life Lara		
Author:	Dandi Daley Mackal	Publisher:	Dutton Children’s Books
Date:	2006		

Summary:

Laney felt the air turn when Lara walked into her classroom. Lara is fat. Really fat. How a kid who looked like this, as big as a sofa, could just sneak into a room, Laney did not know. But Lara was confident and just kept smiling as the students called her names and teased her. Until one day at the school play the kids play a terrible prank on Lara. She becomes the brunt of a terrible joke at the end of the play: she was bombarded with balloons filled with water and lots of little pigs attached and a sign saying “pig wash”. After the incident Lara never came back to school. But she took the blame for all the kids in the class. In the end she taught the kids not to be mean and to appreciate the people you have in your life.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	17	0	10
Big	11	4	35
Overweight			
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Larger than life Lara	19	5	2
Bigger	4	2	6
Biggest	3	2	6
Pig	14	0	0

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem		
Anxiety		
Other: confident	X (always trying to be happy and smiled all the time)	

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		X
Crash dieting		X
Bulimia		X
Anorexia		X
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied	X	
Well Liked		X
Part of Popular Group		X
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other		

Evidence:

“Whoa!” said Eric when he saw Lara.

“Fatty catch”, “hey, fat girl”, “Biggest darn kid I ever did see!” Lara, huh? Larger than life”, “Hey why didn’t you tell me you had an elephant girl at your school?”, “Jumpin Jumbo”.

To Larger-than-life-Lara,

You should be the PIG in our play about Fare Day. Only pigs aren't as fat as you are and they're a heck of a lot prettier too. Why don't you go back to the pigpen where you belong?"

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		X
Lead to Acceptance		X
Personal Happiness		X

Evidence:

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Angelo Pighetti "Pig"		
Title:	Pig and Shrink		
Author:	Pamela Todd	Publisher:	Delacorte Press
Date:	1999		

Summary:

Tucker needs a science experiment for the science fair after the principal nixes his first idea. He is desperate for an idea when he runs smack into Pig. Pig is the fat kid in class who is always being teased. Suddenly Tucker gets an idea to do his experiment on nutrition and obesity and he wants Pig to be his subject. That is easier said than done...it is hard to teach Pig to be a better and healthier eater. Every idea from low fat diets to aversion therapy fails and Pig ends up gaining weight. In the end Tucker realizes that he made a great friend in the process, even if he had to withdraw from the competition. He earned that friendship is a much better thing for the two of them. And Pig does lose weight when he falls for Beth Ellen in the end.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter	3		
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	26		
Big	2		
Overweight	4		
Obese	1		

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Pig	7		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other: dieting	X	

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied	X	
Well Liked		
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other		

Evidence:

“Here piggy, piggy”

“He told me he liked punching fat kids because it didn’t hurt his hand”

But you are a little overweight”

“Hey blubber boy”

“Thanks for the lunch, fatso.”

“He’s fat”

“You understand that, fat boy?”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance		
Personal Happiness	X	

Evidence:

I was happy being who I was and I could be happy again if you'd just quit treating me like your dumb guinea pig and leave me alone (Pig at the end of the science experiment).

What he wouldn't do for science, he did for love.

Pig said "I don't want to lose weight; I like me the way I am."

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Robin		
Title:	Parallel Universe of liars		
Author:	Kathleen Jefferies Johnson	Publisher:	Roaring Brook Press
Date:	2002		

Summary:

Robin is a "chunk" and definitely feels she is fat. Her parents think so too. She has perfectly thin parents who want her to be thin also. Her best friend moves, her parents are divorced and she has her own secrets.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	13		
Big			
Overweight			
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Blob	1		

Bigger	1		
Piggy	8		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem		
Anxiety	X	
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other: eats candy when stressed	X	

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied		
Well Liked		
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers		
Other		

Evidence:

“When you lose a few pounds, your social life will perk right up.”

“What you got in there, babe, a plateful of biscuits.”

“Well you certainly could lose a good 20 pounds. You don’t want to get any heavier.”

“Little Robin fat butt.”

“I thought it’d be a good slenderizing color for you.”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance		
Personal Happiness		

Evidence:

She was happy without losing weight.

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Ryan		
Title:	Go figure		
Author:	Jo Edwards	Publisher:	Simon Pulse
Date:	2007		

Summary:

Ryan is fat and so was her best friend Chelsea until she went away for the summer to Fat Camp without telling Ryan. Ryan used to be skinny until she was ten and went to cheerleading camp and the instructor called her fat and then the teasing began. And she just kept gaining weight until she reached 206 pounds at the age of 17. She was happy the way she was. Her ex boyfriend Noah was on the cover of Rolling Stones...he was the reason she still was involved with the popular group at school. Over time she tried losing weight but went back to the old habits of junk food. She turned to photography and ended up in class with Josh who eventually becomes her boyfriend and could care less about her weight. In the end she has her friends and a boyfriend and is happy, even if she is still fat.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy	1		
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	50		
Big	6		
Overweight	1		
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Blob	2		
Bigger	1		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression	X	

Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied		
Well Liked	X	
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers		
Other		

Evidence:

“No wonder you fell. At this rate, you’re not going to be able to do that move much longer, you’re last weigh in showed you at hundred and twenty-eight pounds.”

“You’re getting really fat, girlie. Really fat” “you don’t want to grow up looking like Carnie Wilson.”

“Fat ass”

“Whale”

“Bubble butt”

“Look at piggy go”

“Jiggle all the way”

“I can’t believe I wasted this much time on a fat girl! I hate fat girls!”

Has Noah always liked bigger girls?

And you’re a big girl

None of the girls in school have ever ignored me for being overweight”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration	X	
Lead to Acceptance	X	
Personal Happiness		

Evidence:

I am tired of being the girl least likely to...

"I kinda like you"

"Are we going to become a couple?"

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Troy Billings		
Title:	Fat Kid Rules the World		
Author:	K.L. Going	Publisher:	GP Putnam's and sons
Date:	2003		

Summary: Troy is the 300 pound fat kid who is ready to commit suicide when Curt saves him. Curt happens to be a legend at school and the two end up in a band together. Over time he learns to play the drums and is part of the band. And finds out more about himself and ends up doing a great job in the band.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter			
Chubby			
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	40		
Big	2		
Overweight	1		
Obese	2		

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Huge	12		
Blimp	1		
Enormous	3		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression	X	
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety	X	
Other: Suicidal	X	

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging	X	
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied	X	
Well Liked		
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other		

Evidence:

Dad drives me to school and as always I am a surreal spectacle...

“Holy shit! Hazel. You see that kid? That kid was, like, three hundred pounds.”

“Snoring like a hog”

They call me fatty and lard ass and blubber.

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		
Lead to Acceptance		
Personal Happiness		

Evidence:

Did not lose weight...

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Wil		
Title:	Huge		
Author:	Sasha Paley	Publisher:	Simon & Schuster
Date:	2007		

Summary:

April and Wil couldn't be any different. Wil was rich and April had saved for a year to attend Wellness Canyon. Wellness Canyon was a weight loss spa and April wanted to lose weight and be popular like she always wanted. Wil had to go for her parents (against her will). Her parents owned exercise clubs and they did not like that their daughter was fat. April couldn't wait to get to work and Wil couldn't wait to get out of there. Wil planned on gaining weight this summer. In the end they both lose weight and gain a new best friend. This is a story of finding out who you are no matter what size you are.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter	1		
Chubby	2		
Heavy			
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	11		
Big			
Overweight	2		
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Huge	1		
Large	2		
Ample	1		
Thick	1		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other: anger	X	

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		
Crash dieting		
Bulimia		
Anorexia		
Other: fat camp	X	

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied	X	
Well Liked		
Part of Popular Group		
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other		

Evidence:

“We hope you’re not fat anymore.”

“Having a chubby daughter is a public relations nightmare”

“Hey pork chop!”

“Lard ass”

“Hey check it out fat camp runaways”

“Moo”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration	X	
Lead to Acceptance	X	
Personal Happiness	X	

Evidence:

She smiled as her newly trimmed body easily managed the trial.

Gained a new friend, April.

Data Collection: The negative portrayal of obese characters in young adult fiction.

Character:	Zachary Beaver		
Title:	When Zachary Beaver came to town		
Author:	Kimberly Willis Holt	Publisher:	Henry Holt and company
Date:	1999		

Summary:

Toby Wilson is having the toughest summer of his life. It’s the summer his mother leaves for good and the summer the fattest boy in the world comes to town. Zachary Beaver comes to town. Zachary turns the Texas town upside down and leaves everyone changed forever. Zachary struggles to find himself in this imperfect world.

Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Fatter	3		
Chubby			
Heavy	1		
Pudgy			
Stocky			
Tubby			
Fat	13		
Big	3		
Overweight			
Obese			

Other Physical Characteristics:

Adjective	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Huge	3		

Psychological Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Depression		
Low Self Esteem	X	
Anxiety		
Other:		

Behavioral Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Binging		X
Crash dieting		X
Bulimia		X
Anorexia		X
Other		

Social Characteristics:

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Teased	X	
Bullied	X	
Well Liked		X

Part of Popular Group		X
Rejected by Peers	X	
Other		

Evidence:

Fattest boy in the world

“He’s just some fat kid”

“Fatty fatty two by four can’t get through the kitchen door”

“He was soooooo fat!”

“Man, that guy was huge!”

“Whoa! That’s a whole lot of person. He could wear a bigger bra than flat chested Kate.”

“Hey fat boy!”

“The fat man is blowing up”

“Lard butt”

Weight loss: (lead to acceptance, admiration or personal happiness)

Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Admiration		X
Lead to Acceptance		X
Personal Happiness		X

Evidence: